



# *direction*



Help me find out  
for myself



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# From the Editor >>>

Those who only know a little about Montessori tend to think of it as 'education for small children' and it is true that most parents come across it when they are looking for a nursery for their child. The Montessori Society AMI UK seeks to dispel this myth and to promote the understanding that Montessori principles are a support to all facets of life and society.

With this objective in mind, this edition of **Direction** brings you such diverse topics as the news about the commitment to establishing a Montessori adolescent programme in the UK to progress on the Montessori community being built in the IDP camps in Kenya. In addition **Beverley Maragh** talks movingly about a project to change the lives of mothers and babies in Holloway prison. As Montessori schools in the UK prepare to participate in Montessori Model United Nations, a project aimed at children to help them understand the way that other cultures and nations think, **Emma Wong Singh** reports on the Teachers' Workshop held in Geneva.

The Montessori Journey and Discovery is a parent education event that helps parents understand the journey that their children will take when they stay on in a Montessori school from infancy to adolescence. Having recently participated in an event, **Léa Morpurgo** explores the benefits of this approach.

In our regular features **Lori Woellhaf** writes a hard hitting article about the Government's published intention to focus on rote learning and **Gayle Wood** looks at what kind of Music the school curriculum should be offering

We hope you enjoy reading it and that you are inspired to think outside the borders of the Montessori nursery!

**Louise Livingston**



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## Update on Corner of Hope, Nakuru, Kenya

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The Corner of Hope is a successful community driven, educational project based on Montessori principles and methodology. The project is located at the New Canaan Community, Nakuru Kenya.

To date the New Canaan community has constructed the New Canaan Montessori School building comprising seven classrooms, a kitchen and workshop as well seven housing structures.

In addition, sixteen teachers from the community have been recruited and trained through St. Ann's Teachers Training College, Nakuru. The teachers have also undertaken teaching practice and classroom management under the mentorship of two trained and experienced Montessori National Diploma holders.

Lastly and most importantly close to 500 children in the 3-8 age range have been given education and balanced nutrition since the inception of the school in April 2010. On average, one hundred children have attended school since the start of the school academic year in Jan 2013. There have been thirty-six new admissions. Relocation of families to two farmland areas called Subukia and Njoro has resulted in the attendance drop. Plans are underway to send some of the recently trained teachers from the Community to at least one of the sites (Njoro) and to ask the building team to create a simple new school in this region.

The seven to eight-year-old children that were in the supplementary classroom during the last academic year have now found placement in the local Primary schools around the area. The six-year-olds that left to go to Primary school from the Children's House have also found placements. Some of these children were able to attend Standard 2 instead of Standard 1, skipping a class, as they were deemed well ahead of their peers from other pre-schools.

A Montessori Elementary Programme for Corner of Hope is still in the planning stages and it is hoped that it will be underway at the latest by August 2013 starting with 2 pre-course 'core' modules. The programme has been delayed due to the School Registration challenges that have been faced at Corner of Hope.

The eight new trainee teachers under the mentorship of the first trained teachers from the camp are doing well in their teaching practice and are working hard to finish making all their materials.

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All the teachers at Corner of Hope are very happy and excited as they have been invited to participate in a puppetry event organised by UNESCO based on a 'culture of peace' theme. Short videos of this show will be submitted for the event that will be held at UNESCO to celebrate the annual International Day of Peace, September 21, 2013.

Seven houses for the community have now been built and are occupied by the teachers and their families. Two more houses will be commenced shortly, followed by eight more thereafter. The community has chosen the families that will be the recipients of the housing. They chose the teachers first, followed by the people who helped to build the school, and lastly families that they have voted as the most needy (children with special needs).

A Community based organisation, 'Self Help Group', will be registered through the offices of the Social Welfare Programme of the Diocese. The Group will operate under the auspices of the Corner of Hope Co-operative programme and will provide income generation and an incentive to support the school financially and enable long - term sustainability.

Lynne Lawrence, Executive Director of Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), initiated the Corner of Hope Project in April 2010 and has been actively engaged at an advisory level in all aspects of its operation. The project is managed on behalf of AMI by Dipika Lakhani and operated on the ground under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru and the St. Ann's Teachers Training College, Nakuru, Kenya.

Although the project is wholly funded by a private foundation based in the USA, it is also generously supported by private donations from many individuals, schools and organisations.

Donations can be made through the AMI website ([www.montessori-ami.org](http://www.montessori-ami.org))



## Montessori Secondary School Project moves forward

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A new partnership has been announced to kick-start a Montessori Secondary programme in the UK run by AMI trained teachers. The Maria Montessori Institute (MMI) and The Montessori Place have agreed to work together on a joint initiative to increase understanding and awareness of the potential for Montessori education beyond the primary years. The collaboration will see the two organisations running a series of public events over the next 4 years and follows the announcement by The Montessori Place that it will open the Montessori Secondary school in 2017.

Louise Livingston, Director of Training at the MMI said: 'Since Montessori Primary schools are now becoming well established in the UK, the time has come for our Montessori community to think about taking the next step, an environment for the adolescent. Around the world there is great experience in Montessori secondary work and here in the UK, a great desire. This initiative will bring that experience and desire together.'

At the first of the joint events in April, Laurie Ewert-Krocker journeyed from the Hershey Farm School in Ohio to share her experience of the Montessori adolescent programme for 12-15 year olds. Around 100 parents and professionals met in Hampstead to hear Ms Ewert-Krocker explain how the practical and social environment of the land-based community so thoroughly meets the physical and psychological needs of the adolescent during these formative years.

At the same event, Rob Gueterbock from The Montessori Place revealed that a search is underway for a small-holding of between 10 and 30 acres between Gatwick and Brighton. The farm school, for 12-18 year olds, will accommodate up to 60 students with a 50:50 split between residential and day students. Twenty places will be available in the first year with a subsequent intake of ten per year.

## Countdown to International Montessori Congress in Portland

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If you have not yet decided how you are going to spend your summer how about a trip to Portland where thousands of the world's education professionals will gather to explore the universal themes and unique facets of Montessori. Trainers,

teachers, administrators and parents from nearly every continent will be united to celebrate, learn and

connect on their shared commitment to the work of Dr. Maria Montessori. The congress will be held from July 31st to 4th August and will focus around the theme 'Montessori - Guided by Nature'. It is not too late to book your place and be part of this special event. Find out more about what will be happening and how to register by visiting [www.montessoricongress.org](http://www.montessoricongress.org)

## Thanks to Sue Palmer

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After three years as President of the Montessori Society AMI (UK), Sue Palmer has decided to step down. Although her position is to be replaced, our relationship with Sue on a perhaps more informal basis will continue. Her work with children across the UK has many areas of commonalities with the AMI, and we are confident that our relationship will continue for the long term. We thank her for accepting the position of President for three years, and for helping to strengthen our voice throughout the UK. We have look forward to welcoming our new President shortly.



## Why is clothing important?

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*I was looking at the Aid To Life website ([www.aidtolife.org](http://www.aidtolife.org)) recently, and there was an entire section devoted to clothing. Why is clothing so important?*

As adults our appearance forms a major part of who we are, and the choices we make on a daily basis with regard to what we wear often reflects how we feel and also defines how we would like others to see us. Our preoccupations are adult ones and reflect our tendency to reach beyond ourselves to others and the environment. Turning to the world of the infant, we will see that his preoccupation (if we can call it that) centres on very different things.

Let us conjure up some images of the baby as he grows into a young child. First, we see the slithering newborn, moving slowly and deliberately towards the walls of his Moses basket until he reaches its edge. Next, we see the 3 month old, taking swipes at a single bell on a ribbon dangling nonchalantly above his head. And then there is the 6 month old, his hands unencumbered by his previous

need to support his trunk able now to sit steadily enough to manipulate a basket of interesting objects. We see the crawling baby, confident at 8 months, moving swiftly from room to room, constantly seeking to expand his frame of reference, his world. At around a year, his newly found skill of walking is already being challenged by the desire to carry heavy objects and to climb upwards, be it up the stairs or tackling climbing frames. From one to two to three years old, we see no end to the challenges he sets himself because what lies behind all those challenges is his developmental drives. Each conquest will lead to the next, climbing ever up towards his goal of independence. Each of his purposeful movements signifying a developmental step forward, a connection made neurologically that sets the pattern and the pathways that will lead to mental maturity.

Busy creating himself, the baby is not interested in his appearance indeed he has not yet reached that level of abstraction to even consider it. Let us introduce him to clothes made of natural fibres that help his skin breathe. Let the fabric have 'give' to allow unhindered movement at the shoulders, hip, elbows and knees. Release his hands from mitts so that he can touch his skin when he is born, able now to reconnect with one of the few familiar points of reference he has in the world outside of his mother's womb. Warm the room so that he is able to crawl and pull up with bare feet, allowing all of the intricate muscles in his foot to work together and in opposition unhindered by socks or shoes, that shield the muscles from contact. As soon as he is able we will place in his drawer pairs of trousers that have an elasticated waists for him to pull up and take off all by himself. We can see that the clothes he wears can either help or hinder the realisation of his developmental conquests. His mind is in the making, and to consider this aspect, when we choose our baby's clothes, will assure us of the appropriate choices to make.

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## Early Years Educator

First of all, don't worry - the government is going to continue to recognise all qualifications that have previously been recognised as 'full and relevant' for being considered as part of the ratios for a nursery delivering the EYFS so you should not need to go back to college. Draft criteria for the new qualification were issued earlier on this year

*I have been reading in the press lately that the government are bringing in a new Early Years qualification called the Early Years Educator and we will need to have this if we want to work in a Montessori nursery. I cannot consider going back to college to get this qualification. What can I do if I want to continue working?*

and the Montessori training providers, who have been in frequent discussions with the Teaching Agency, are confident

that their qualifications more than fulfil them.

# Demystifying the work cycle

*I have heard Montessori teachers talk about the 'work cycle' but never quite understood what it was about. Could you explain the reasons for this work cycle and why so much emphasis is placed on it in all the Montessori environments I have come across?*

The work cycle refers to the minimum period of time where there is no interruption from required group activities. It offers every child the time for both concentrated work and for contemplation. Both states are as important as each other. The concentration on a task brings understanding and the

contemplation allows the child time to crystallise his thoughts. By giving enough time for each state to have its time we will see the child flourish. The quest each child makes is unique and the journey is assured.

To protect the work cycle is to protect the individuality of each

child. In every authentic Montessori environment we see children with different personalities working separately and together in various ways. To offer each child the opportunity to work in harmony with their inner guides, as opposed to an arbitrary externally set timetable of lesson plans, is to understand that it is only the child who can create himself. With that faith, must come the time to help that to happen for each and every child.

## To read or not to read?

To understand Montessori's vision for the child is to understand her premise that every child is capable of so much more than we think; their potential far exceeds our expectations. This potential can be realised when we pay attention to the whole child.

The model imperative (for many parents) is often the traditional model of education. Montessori's approach to education is a model (if we can call it that) that cannot be added to or subtracted from any existing model; and this is often the misconception. To understand the Montessori approach, is to turn the traditional model on its head because how we see the child is different. From this different vantage point, we can start to appreciate education as an aid to life.

What is the essential point of learning to read and write? Learning to read is about discovering what other people have thought about over time and to write is to express our

*I have explained to many in my parent community about the value of not introducing reading or writing to their child at home before they are ready. Some though, insist that it does their child no harm. How can I help those parents understand the value in waiting a little longer than they would otherwise?*

own thoughts through the written word, giving a written means to our expression to others now and in the future. To find joy in the whole process is therefore an essential precondition, as without joy, there is little interest. To imbue joy, is to approach a task with just enough challenge to stretch our existing capabilities. If the challenge is too great, then a sense that it is all too much may arise. On the other hand, if there is too little challenge, interest will subside.

The secret component therefore to nurturing this sense of joy in reading and writing, is to carefully prepare the hand, the eyes, the ears and the mind of the child. The practical life activities, the sensorial and the language materials all prepare the child. Once all is prepared, then the child will discover all by himself that he is able to write, and then to read. A discovery

made all by one-self creates a much more meaningful and lasting impression than a skill that is taught.

Understanding Montessori's approach and helping your parent community to understand this new model imperative is the first step. Sharing each child's journey with the parent forms part of the on-going discussion.

## Comments, Questions?

Please send in your letters to:

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## The Value of Not Knowing

*Pilar Bewley, Montessori teacher and mother, talks about how important it is that we don't answer all our children's questions*

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Margaret, a veteran elementary Montessori teacher, overheard a conversation between Steven and Paula, two children who were conducting a science experiment. Steven lifted up a half-full test tube. 'Hey, the solution isn't turning blue the way it's supposed to!' Paula scratched her head. 'What do you think we did wrong?' Steven sighed and said, 'I don't know, let's ask Miss Margaret.' With a dismissive gesture of the hand, Paula replied, 'Nah, don't ask her. She doesn't know anything! I saw a chemistry book in the library, let's look there.'

For Margaret, this was a moment of triumph, an indication that she was doing her job right. She obviously knows the answers to many of her students' questions: why leaves turn red, why ice melts, and why fish have gills. She even knows why the children's science experiment flopped. However, her standard response whenever a student asks a 'why' question is: 'I don't know, but wouldn't it be interesting to find out?'

The Montessori guide knows that she's not serving her students' best interests by providing the answers they seek. In the real world, we rarely have someone by our side answering all our questions. And even if we did, it wouldn't do us much good in the long run; research shows that the most effective learning takes place through active



participation, not passive absorption.

Think about what happens when you're driving in an unfamiliar area of town. If the GPS is telling you what to do, you'll probably arrive at your destination with little hassle, but you won't remember how you got there! If instead you use a map and other hands-on navigation tools, you might feel a little lost at first, but you'll eventually find your way. More importantly, you'll feel quite confident navigating the neighborhood the next time you visit.

The hands-on navigation tools that Montessori elementary teachers offer include Montessori materials, books, stories, diagrams, experiments, Going Out trips, and access to experts in all fields of study. The teacher provides an initial lesson using materials and storytelling. But the lesson is only a jumping-off point and is designed to generate more questions than answers.

Once the lesson ends, the 'why's' begin, and this is where the teacher happily replies: 'I don't know, but wouldn't it be interesting to find out?'

## Screen Time and Childhood

*Jennifer Rogers has been a Montessori teacher for 20 years. She talks here about how important it is for parents to get wise about the damage screens can cause young minds*

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Fourteen years ago the American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP] issued a policy statement addressing children's screen time that created a media hubbub. The statement was weak and ineffective. The ruckus was in grand disproportion to the Academy's ho-hum recommendation that parents 'avoid television for children under the age of two years.' It generated no positive results. Screen time for all children continues to increase. Parents still consider the television a member of the family. Mobile apps are every parent's new best friend.

Parents now assume screen time is an important element in early

childhood development. Only 14% of parents remember their pediatricians giving any advice about media use, despite the Academy's 2011 reassertion of their policy. Pediatricians know parents quit listening to that message more than a decade ago. Our best educators worry about the influence of unregulated technology use on the growth of young minds, wonder at the obvious but under-reported connections between screen time and the deterioration of attention. They know they cannot hold the attention of children raised on two-second sound bites.

Children spend an average of five to seven hours every day in front of a screen. The only activity that occupies more time for children is sleeping. These same young kids are experiencing speech and language delays, and chronic attention problems. Literacy is becoming increasingly hard to achieve, creativity rare. Though there is little research to establish connections between so many young children's failure to thrive and their over-exposure to technologies, the conclusion that screen time is corroding young minds seems ridiculously obvious to most teachers.

The AAP's most recent research indicates that a shocking 90% of children younger than two watch some form of electronic media. By age three, one third of these kids have televisions in their bedrooms. Modern parents consider one of the most unpredictably dangerous influences on the lives of young children to be a peacekeeper, a 'safe' activity for their children.

Well-educated, upwardly mobile parents fancy educational technology for kids. Lower income families use the television as a babysitter. The New York Times calls this the 'app gap.' The Times points out that both sets of parents are

thumbing their noses at the AAP, relying on screens to occupy their children. The Mayo Clinic's available information for parents acknowledges a lack of definitive research, but links too much screen time to behavioral problems, irregular sleep, poor academic performance and, most convincingly, obesity. Most major public health organisations have described obesity in epidemic terms. Screen time is obviously not the only cause of obesity, but experts consider it a primary gateway to things like soda pop, sedentary lifestyles and high-fat snack foods.

The effects of screen time on the health of families are easy to visualise: An overweight family gathered around the television, eating separate, high-fat meals, sharing two-litre bottles of soda. Young children eating finger-foods in their car seats, mesmerized by the screens attached to their parents' head rests. Bug-eyed youngsters passing time on iPads and cell phones loaded with mobile apps.

The AAP, the National Institute of Health and the Mayo Clinic urge parents to limit and plan screen time, and strongly discourage allowing children to eat in front of a screen. Do not allow children to have televisions or computers in their bedrooms, they say. Do not leave the television on throughout the day. Make choices. Plan outdoor activities. Turn the television off for a day. Though teachers know parents are not following the AAP guidelines, they know less screen time for longer would build a healthier child.

A paltry 10% of parents follow the AAP guidelines. There are apps available for kids so

young they are more inclined to chew the cell phone. The thought of commuting or eating or falling asleep without a screen makes most parents shudder.

Teachers do not have spare time and money to sponsor research. Studies into the effects of screen time on children will probably always be poorly funded and inherently limited in scope and value. Even the best studies cannot compare a mature adult with the person she might have become, had she enjoyed a different upbringing. When a child is diagnosed with hyperactivity or an attention deficit, parents can get a prescription with relative ease. But they cannot get a do-over. When an adolescent commits an act of violence, it's too late to turn off the video games.

Good parenting has never been easy. Bad parenting has never been easier. Screen time seems like a safe, peaceful, educational way for parents to entertain their children. Teachers of every age group know we will have to change our approaches to remain relevant and keep kids engaged in learning. Good teachers of the world will continue to dream of every child reaching his or her potential. Good parents of the world will dream too, resisting, adjusting and adapting to protect our children from the influences most of the world has accepted without question.



# Only in a Montessori Classroom

*Peter Davidson, regular Blogger on Maria Montessori.com talks observes the amazing capacity of a toddler for purposeful work*

I recently visited a Montessori school in Arizona and had the opportunity to observe in the toddler classroom. On this particular morning there were eight children present, the youngest being 18 months of age and the oldest close to 30 months. It was toward the end of the morning, and the children were choosing their own activities. One little boy was using the colorful wooden rings of a stacking toy, while nearby another was working on his buttoning skills. Several children were engaged in art activities – colouring, pasting shapes on paper, and modeling clay – while others were matching objects to corresponding pictures. As it was near the end of the morning, an adult asked one little girl if she wanted to help set up for lunch. Boy! Did she! There were two longer tables in the classroom, each with four chairs. Apparently, these were the lunch tables, for she went to the shelf and retrieved a tablecloth and proceeded to cover one of these tables.

First she unfolded the four feet of cloth, much longer than she was tall, then attempted to drape it as far onto the table as she could reach. Next, she toddled around to the far end of the table, to pull the tablecloth over. She leaned over the table, but couldn't quite reach the edge. Undeterred, she returned to the first end, and pushed the cloth a little farther across the surface of the table. Now when she circled to the other end and leaned over, she could just reach it. She gave it a tug. As you can probably guess, this time she pulled the tablecloth too far.

This required that she once more return to the beginning and pull the tablecloth toward herself until it was fully extended and just hanging over both ends of the table by an equal amount. She patted the cloth 3 times, first at one end of the table, and then at the other. 'Whew,' I thought, 'that was a lot of work for a toddler!' But, to my surprise, she wasn't nearly done.

Now she returned to the shelf to fetch a placemat. She selected a plaid one and put it on the tablecloth in front of one of the 4 chairs, and looked at it. For whatever reason, this plaid placemat just didn't appeal to her. So, she returned it to the shelf and selected a solid beige one instead. Apparently this satisfied her aesthetic sense, for she returned to the shelf three more times, and soon before each chair there was a nice clean beige placemat.

She studied the table for a moment, and then toddled back to the shelf for a plate. The plates were white ceramic ones and as she headed back to the table the teacher made one comment. 'Please remember to carry the plates with two hands.' That's all. No 'Be careful that you don't drop it!' Not even, 'Oh what a good job you are doing!' As a result, she continued with her work undisturbed.

After four trips, each placemat held a ceramic plate. Now it was time to bring the glassware: one small juice glass for each place mat. Then she stood back and admired the table, but only for a moment, for there was another



table to set! So, without further ado, she returned to the shelf and repeated the process of tablecloth, placemats, plates and glasses for the second table.

As she concluded her work, the teacher announced that it was time for the children to come to group time. I retrieved my things and glanced at my watch before rising to go. I had been watching this one little girl for 30 minutes! And, did she look tired after her exertions? Not in the least. In fact, she looked refreshed and happy and she joined her group of friends, with the satisfaction of a job well done.

It occurred to me as I left that hardly anywhere else could this have happened except in a Montessori classroom. Where else would the adult have considered that such a tiny child could be capable of setting the table, and would actually want to? What took this little one 30 minutes to accomplish, an adult could have done in 3. In few situations would the child have been allowed the uninterrupted time she required to accomplish this large task. In most situations a well-meaning adult would have undoubtedly said, 'Here, let me do that for you' which might well have stopped this spontaneous expression of purpose and independence.

## Montessori Journey and Discovery

*Léa Morpurgo recently experienced this unique parent education experience alongside parents at the Maria Montessori Institute. She talks about what it can reveal to parents about their child and the Montessori approach*

Most parents across the world will agree that when being re-united with their child at the end of the school day, their good-willed, enthusiastic and curious 'What did you do today then?' or similar questions, are almost always met with the same tough and conversation forbidding response 'Nothing' or 'Can't remember'. It is as though the child is saying, 'This is my day, thank you. Could I keep it to myself for a bit longer? I have seen and felt so many wonderful things today and made so many great big wonderful efforts that I would have to speak all the way home and during tea and in the bath and before bed time and after bed time and then well *past* my bed time, if I had to tell you about them all. But now that I am tired and hungry, what makes me truly happy is to eat this croissant in silence and keep my day to myself until you are least expecting it. Then I'll tell you. Then you'll be surprised.'

The truth of it is, that children reveal what they get up to at 'school' if and when they feel like it and completely in their own time. Certainly, when they do share their experiences, as parents, we cannot expect to receive them in neat concise sentences and developmental power point presentation, stating exactly where they can presently be pin pointed along the chart to life-long physical, emotional and academic success for parental convenience. Instead, their personal challenges and successes can be revealed in their day-to-day lives through watching them move and in moving with them, in listening to them and in conversing with them and in acknowledging their unique developing characters. And most of the time, this is best. The child has a freedom to experience, to think his own thoughts about his own experiences, to find them special for his own reasons, to build upon them in his own way.

Montessori teachers are frequently reminded to be vigilant and avoid

thinking they need to be there to witness every single moment in the child's day, that doing so increases the likelihood of interference, trampling opportunities for independent trial and developing a positive relationship to error. Likewise a verbal comment or even praise of what a child is doing has the power to take away his ownership of it and in that moment chip away at the precious self-confidence he has built. Understanding the power of words is important for anyone in the presence of a child, and may be especially helpful in moments such as pick up time when the child is making up his own mind about the enterprises of his day.

Holding back one's curiosity as a parent is made easier when the school environment, its pedagogy and teachers are familiar to us. With a real understanding and belief in the Montessori method applied in school, we can rest assured that our children are where they need to be, in an environment which prizes their safety, their happiness and their positive development. But how many parents have an understanding of how a Montessori approach supports the child in his development and what opportunities it offers to him?

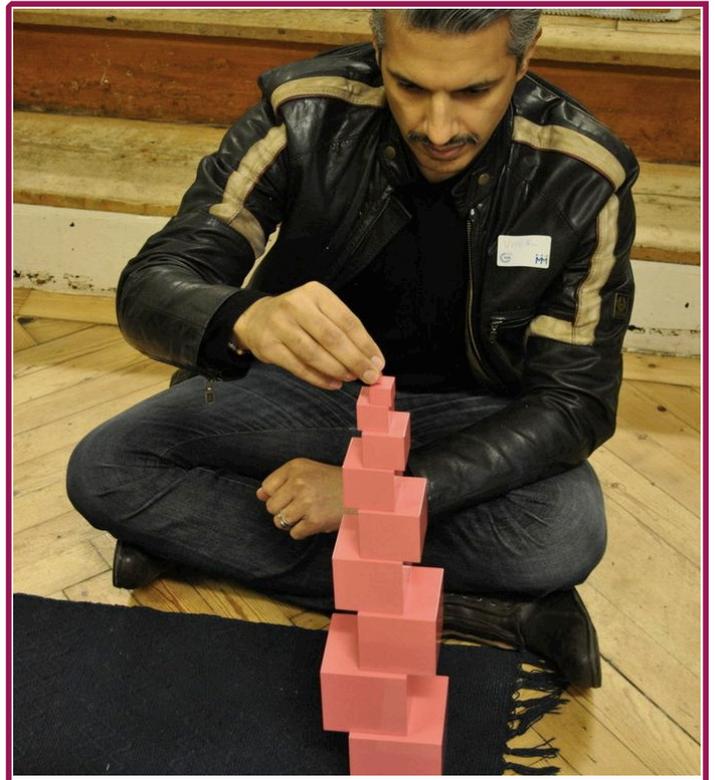


On the other side of the front door, Montessorians across the world ask themselves what they can do for parents. They feel lucky for the years of experience with many different children. They feel lucky to see how a Montessori environment supports the children every day from their time in the Infant Community through the Children's House and Elementary and into the ErdKinder. They feel lucky to be surrounded by a worldwide community that regularly creates the opportunity for them to meet Montessori teachers with up to 60 years experience with whom they can pick apart the principles of a Montessori environment and discuss how to become more adept at supporting the child. They can meet experts in their fields, neurologists, human rights lawyers and authors, who share the same overarching message and show them how relevant their work is to the contemporary world. They have been searching for a way to offer parents a similar opportunity to build a deeper understanding of Montessori education: the reasons behind the values it upholds, the role of the adult in the Montessori community, the true purpose and beauty of the Montessori materials?

Shortly after founding her own Montessori school in Texas in 1971, Barbara Gordon, now a world renown Montessorian and consultant to schools throughout the United States, began to ask herself the same questions. Of course, the need for more support wasn't for lack of curiosity and good will on the part of the parents. They had answered to what was on offer, they had come to view the environments before registering their children, they had come to the parent meetings, they had attended the informal seminars she held throughout the term. It simply wasn't enough.

« I am so moved that my child is learning about the decimal system in this way »»

Three things were clear. Firstly, Barbara's words could only help her so far in this venture. The deeper understanding could not be contained in a 6-7 evening lecture in the same way and was going to demand far more of her time and more of the parents' time too. The change would reflect a great work of prioritisation for the good of the child and his community. Secondly, until now, the information parents had been given about Montessori and a Montessori environment had always been second hand, through Barbara and through their children. From now on the doors needed to be swung open and the Montessori environments opened and



offered up to parents. Only *in* them could they learn *from* them and make their own judgements *of* them. Not from their chairs in a corner of the room, on the outside looking in, but in a far more involving and emotional way. Finally, parents should be supported and encouraged to share and discuss their realisations, their thoughts and feelings along this journey. This sense of a journey to discovery, inspired the name of the experience that Barbara began to develop for parents – Montessori Journey and Discovery.

The Journey and Discovery comes in the form of a two-part workshop with parents. On a Friday evening, the school staff prepare and perfect the rooms of each environment, as they would for the children and lay out a number of carefully chosen materials on floor mats around the room. After a refreshing cup of tea and meeting with Barbara, the parents embark on the first leg of their voyage, The Journey, in which they are led, in silence, through each Montessori environment, beginning with the Infant Community, the Children's House, the lower and lastly the upper Elementary class. Before beginning their walk, they are encouraged to have a really good look at the materials on the shelves in each space, to note those that attracted them the most and spot those they might want to work with the next day, all along taking great care to hold back from touching anything in the rooms. They are also asked to reflect upon the differences between the environments and the atmospheres each evoked. A little like the music which sets the scene before the play, the Journey is designed to be a time of preparation, an opportunity for parents to pull the curtain down on other concerns and events of

the day and week and be together as parents, grounded in this moment, devoted to the experience they have all come to share and to learn from, with their children's wellbeing at the centre.

After a night's rest, they meet again the next morning for the second leg, the Discovery. Parents at last lay their hands on the materials specific to each environment and so each plane of development. As in the Journey, they start all together in the Infant Community and work their way around the building, spending 30-45 minutes in each. They choose from any of the materials laid out on the floor mats. These are now accompanied by a card in which parents read either the main pointers of the activity to carry out themselves or the instruction to ask for a presentation from an adult which guides them in their work. The aim is to give parents as close a mimic of the experience as that of the children in each space and thereafter to open up a conversation in which all can volunteer thoughts, realisations and further questions.

The results were formidable. Barbara had devised a way for parents to step into their children's shoes and learn about the Montessori approach in an innovative way. With more parents requesting to take part, the number of workshops Barbara led immediately grew exponentially. The success of her workshops spread first nationally and then internationally and in January 2013, she finally travelled to London to the Maria Montessori Institute in Hampstead to run a model workshop upon which the staff could strive to base their future Journeys and Discoveries. I was fortunate enough to attend this workshop.

As for all the workshops, Barbara began by discussing the outline of the sessions and then began the Journey in which some of the parents were already popping to work with the materials. Others it was later revealed were a little more

apprehensive, having been packed off with a fierce instruction to "Do long division mummy."

The following day, parents arrived into the environments and the adults were in their roles, ready to give presentations or subtle words of guidance when needed. Interestingly, just like the children, some parents knew exactly which activities they were headed for, others were more cautionary, and upon entering the environments they preferred to size up the activities available to them or even spent time simply watching a presentation. Some parents were very busy and wanted to be acquainted with almost every piece laid out, others spent the full 45 minutes deeply engaged in a single one. Yet others still needed regular periods of rest between pieces of work. The parents were living the benefits of a Montessori environment. Whilst one determined parent persevered and finally problem solved without interference from the adult, another, with his Trinomial Cube still in ruins and a very nearly disheartened look on his face was lifted by a warm, friendly smile from the adult and a re-presentation. Some who had previously been presented a material spontaneously began to help their peers by presenting it to them instead. At the end of every activity, each material needed to be left just ready for the next person and just as ordered, gleaming and inviting as before. This way, each adult received the same sense of care for others and pride in taking responsibility for the whole community as the children do.

In the Children's House, the parents could work independently, with the space and time to follow their interests, and the freedom to repeat the activity as many times as they liked or to put it away. They could take care of their environment, polish it, scrub it, water its plants. They could take care of themselves, washing hands, tying bows, folding clothes and polishing their shoes. They could spend time with a selection of concrete and abstract mathematical and language materials. In the Elementary, more activities happened in groups. They could hear great stories about how language and maths came to be. Some dissected fish, others did not! Some charted rivers across the world to work out their lengths, others dived into the grammar boxes.

When the parents finally came together at the end of the session, each shared their own personal experiences that reflected a new and fantastic depth of understanding. Whether practical, mathematical, linguistic or botanical, each and every one had had a positive experience and saw how crucial it was to be in a joyful and non-judgemental



atmosphere for their curiosity and desire for learning to awaken. They recognised the need for a mixed age group, how much fun it had been to be able to teach each other. They experienced first hand how important it was for the teachers to respect their work pattern and how much more interested they were in something when they were left to choose it themselves. They were given the opportunity to go within themselves, to concentrate without intervention for the longest period of time so far that week!

However, one of the most important exclamations, which occurred a number of times, came from parents who felt they had truly underestimated their children's capabilities. The children could all do so much! They could hold complex sequences of events in their minds at the age of 3! They could understand abstract mathematical concepts that parents themselves had still not got the hang of! Having realised this and seen their child's journey mapped out by the environments, many verbalised how determined they were not only to lift their expectations but also to trust in their children more.

Life goes at such a pace that we often feel disconnected from ourselves, let alone others. The

Journey and Discovery was designed to open the doors of the Montessori environments for parents to gain greater understanding in this method built upon and led by the development of the child. This way, parents would feel happy, reassured and trust in the Montessori approach, but most importantly they would come to trust in the children.

« I was about to hand in my notice to transfer my child to the local primary school but I know now I would not want her to be in any other environment – we are staying! »



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## Montessori Model United Nations - Inspiring Youth to Create a Better World

*Emma Wong Singh, Chairman of the Montessori Society AMI UK talks about her recent visit to the Teacher's Workshop on the Montessori Model United Nations, encouraging other Montessori schools to get involved!*

'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'

AMI's representative to UNESCO, Victoria Barres referred to this quote by the poet Archibald MacLeish in an article on Montessori and UNESCO she wrote in 2004 [1]. It is an insightful quotation because it calls to our attention the science of peace and that its solution lies within us, falling within our realm of capability.

Many of us see Maria Montessori as an advocate for social reform, looking beyond the implementation of her scientific materials on an individual basis towards adopting a wider significance. She based her views on the insistence that it was only through education that peace could be achieved. Her speeches during the 1930s delivered at international congresses, peace councils around the world and then collated in her 'Education and Peace' title, earned her the right as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1950, while participating in the founding meetings of UNESCO institution, she called for international peace through the means of education. She said,

'When children are accustomed, from earliest childhood onwards, to considering those who surround them as a source of help to explore the world, they are not tempted to adopt a wary or hostile attitude towards men who belong to different races or religions. At a later date, children raised according to these principles will be of great help in the construction of a peaceful society and the encouragement of this understanding among nations that UNESCO has set as its ideal.' [2]

Her vision for peace was clear, and over her lifetime she informed not just a philosophy (as so many have done before and after her) but a complete curriculum that can be applied to every classroom and individual in the world. Her genius extended beyond philosophical notions, to an entire set of

scientific materials designed with consideration of help to and guidance of the child's inner development. Furthermore, Barres points out in her 2004 article that,

'Schools were a means to reach her goal of helping children develop harmoniously in healthy environments; they were never an end in themselves. If families and communities did not become more understanding of the child's developmental needs, then the goals of helping humanity develop its potential would not be reached.'

The Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN) is a programme that is dedicated to Maria Montessori's conviction that it is through the child that we can seek to build and foster harmonious relationships with others and in doing so, can construct a peaceful society. It is also dedicated to the Ambassador to the United Nations from the Dominican Republic Francis Lorenzo who vividly portrayed the importance of the mission of nurturing leaders of tomorrow when he stated,

'The next generation of leaders will come from this programme. Soon they will be sitting here, and it will be their responsibility to complete what we have left undone.'

The MMUN began in October 2006 in New York City, and for the first time in November 2012, the Teacher's Workshop was brought to Europe, to Geneva, where Montessori teachers from all over the world gathered to learn how the MMUN works to achieve its educational goals. The mission of the MMUN is to inspire youth [3]. We learnt that the MMUN students (from 9 to 15 years old) formulate, present, debate and revise positions on current issues that are affecting people of the world. They assume the perspectives of a citizen of their selected countries, and so the MMUN students not only develop an understanding of the needs and rights of others, but also learn to respect the

the cultures, the political views, and the belief system of others. The mission continues,

'Taking on their ambassadorial roles in a Model UN simulation, students research the issue that their UN committees will address. Model UN participants learn how the international community acts on its concerns about topics including peace and security, human rights, the rights of the child, child labour, the environment, food and hunger, economic development and globalization. Model UN delegates also look closely at the needs, goals and foreign policies of the countries they will represent at the event. The insights they gain from their exploration of history, geography, culture, economics and science contribute to the authenticity of the simulation.

When they arrive at the MMUN Conference students transform themselves into UN Ambassadors and assume the rights and responsibilities of world leaders. Their imaginations propel them to create collaborative resolutions to our world's most pressing problems. MMUN encourages students to know that they can make a difference.'

The child at this age has a sensitivity for reason, justice and morality and is ripe for the experiences that the MMUN programme offers. The opportunities offered know no boundaries in their appeal to the imagination of these individuals. The necessary preparations at school also offer many new learning opportunities: The research and writing of position papers to be submitted prior to the conference, the formulaic language (new vocabulary and type of address) required when presenting a case at the conference, the careful consideration of the content and how to deliver it, the rules of procedure used in committee. In addition, the teamwork means that all personality types have something of value to offer. All these facets call for a discipline that build positively and harmoniously upon the foundations laid during the first plane of development. The MMUN experience extends the work of the child during his second plane of development towards the wonder of reality and presents him with a clear, strong and positive route to resolving conflict. This, if experienced first hand during the childhood years will set the stage for the patterns for future behaviour, allowing therefore Maria Montessori's vision of peace to continue with its light shining ever brighter.

From 9 years old, the elementary

child's experience in the Montessori classroom is extended to encompass the grappling of world issues he perhaps has never previously thought about. Furthermore, by taking on a country's view he is formulating and debating for a particular position that will not necessarily be his own. He starts to see the world in a different light, in fact, in a myriad of lights previously unbeknownst to him. The world is made up of countries and peoples holding bundles of unique experiences that require the time and thought to understand, just as his experiences have had the time to reveal themselves. The child comes to the realisation that we belong to a world made up of incredible diversity which can and is causing conflict, but through the power of greater understanding and the means to achieve this greater understanding, he can find a peaceful resolution. The awareness of the interrelatedness of issues will help the child to start to appreciate the complexity involved in tackling global issues. Profound lessons are learnt in the process for the child at 9 years old and the emerging social embryo we see in the adolescence from 12 years old. Each child's journey will be unique, and the value great.

If your upper elementary class would like to participate in the MMUN programme please contact Judith Cunningham at [info@montessori-mun.org](mailto:info@montessori-mun.org) or visit [www.montessori-mun.org](http://www.montessori-mun.org) for further information.

#### References

- 1 Victoria Barres Maria Montessori and UNESCO [www.montessori-ami.org](http://www.montessori-ami.org)
- 2 UNESCO Features, Paris November 1952
- 3 Taken from [www.montessori-mun.org](http://www.montessori-mun.org)



# Features

## A Vision of a Montessori Land-based Community for Adolescents

*With plans for a Montessori Adolescent programme in the UK by 2017 under way, we offer an article by **Laurie Ewert-Krocker**, founder of the first Montessori-inspired adolescent programme at the Hershey Montessori School*

**T**he vision that Maria Montessori suggested of a prepared environment to aid the self-construction of adolescents from 12-18 is a *social environment* that supports the development of individual human potential and provides a social context for the individual to operate in collaboration with and responsibility toward others. Dr. Montessori recognised that humans, fundamentally social in nature, do not develop as isolated individuals, but find individual expression by participating in the social fabric. Although we require the ability to think, act, and create as free and independent beings, with all of our human faculties developed, we are ultimately free only in the context of collaboration with others to promote the welfare of the human species as a whole. Her vision for all children, for all of humanity, is a compelling one of fully realised individual beings who are capable of independence in every facet of life, but who use their independence and freedom to understand and support the *interdependence* of humans toward an increasingly peaceful society.

 **The farm is a limitless field for scientific and historic discoveries** 

A child who has reached the third plane of development, an emerging adolescent, who has been supported in the earlier stages of development by appropriate environments and self-constructing activities, is 'reborn' in adolescence into a period of intense preparation for adulthood. This preparation requires some protection, says Dr. Montessori - particularly during early adolescence, which can be a vulnerable and unstable time of growth, identity, and character formation; but adolescence also requires increasing participation in experiences of social organisation: the

ways in which groups of people living and working together, whether in close proximity in a community or as a collective on the planet, must cooperate, collaborate, divide labour, share resources, problem-solve, and nurture respect for life and hope for the future. This collaboration, this interdependence, which Dr. Montessori notes in her writings, already exists by virtue of our commonalities as humans and now through our shared scientific and technological culture, must be lived, must be experienced, and must be practiced by young people preparing to take over responsibility for its framework and evolution.

Adolescents must be put in a position to experience and understand the *role of the individual in society*, which is to contribute to the overall enterprise of human collaboration.

The environment Montessori described as best suited for this developmental task is an operating farm where students live, work, and study in a microcosm of society, while engaging in the farm community's related commercial enterprises—and



by modern extension—land and resource management and stewardship. What the farm as environment provides is a multi-faceted experience of meeting fundamental human needs in very concrete ways: providing one's food, maintaining the buildings where one lives and works, participating in economic endeavours, interacting with the natural world, adapting to and building upon the natural world with technology—participating in human-made supra-nature. All of these experiences are possible and immediate on the farm. In addition, such close interaction with the land and the local community places an adolescent in the context of the history of humans in various stages of evolution toward increasingly sophisticated systems of culture and civilisation. On the farm adolescents experience the natural world, the necessary organisation of society and experiences of history first hand. As Montessori says in *From Childhood to Adolescence* the farm, is 'a limitless field for scientific and historic studies'.



The opportunity for membership in a small community of people who work, study, produce, and care for their land and their living space together also provides opportunities for 'valorisation'—a term Dr. Montessori used to describe the strengthening of one's personality and the experience of value in one's contribution, expertise, or stewardship. The more diverse the opportunities are for contributions to the community, the more opportunities there are for valorisation. The farm environment makes such opportunities for real and purposeful work immediate and diverse.

On a farm there is food to grow, both for sale and for consumption. There are animals to raise and care for. There are natural resources like soil, water, and forests - all of which require management, economic investment, and environmental

stewardship. There are products to be made and sold: furniture, beeswax candles, reed baskets and maple syrup.

There are also people in the community who have histories to share, who are resources with expertise and wisdom. Neighbours share our land and water resources; young children need partnerships and role models; elders benefit from opportunities to teach others their expertise and value the companionship of young people. In some cases, citizens of our communities may not have access to fresh local food or clean water. Our neighbours may be faced with significant economic or environmental challenges; they may need information about alternatives and risks - which adolescents can research and provide.



Young people can contribute all of these things to their communities through their study, their problem-solving and their economic endeavours. They are highly motivated to be part of such adult-like activity. They want to have a 'seat at the table', they want to contribute, and when we offer opportunities to them, they dive into acquisition of new knowledge and new skills. They work hard. They create possibilities.

'School', said Dr. Montessori, should be a 'school of experience in the elements of social life' for adolescents. It should be a 'Preparation for Adulthood' - an adulthood of thinking, contributing, problem-solving, and collaborating - of taking care of oneself, others, and the environment for the good of all. Such work requires knowledge, critical thinking skills, communication abilities, mathematical thinking. If we don't offer our adolescents experience at this level of contribution, we deprive them of the necessary practice for adulthood and we deprive ourselves of their potential for positive change.

## On the Use of a Dummy

*An article written by Assistant to Infancy, **Paul Pillai** and **Judi Orion**, AMI 0-3 Trainer to help you reflect on whether the use of a dummy is appropriate for your baby.*

One of the many decisions you are likely to face as a new parent is whether or not to offer your child a dummy. For some parents it is a straightforward decision, while for others it can be a confusing and at times emotional topic. Whether you choose to use a dummy or not is very much a personal decision and no doubt the decision you make will be the right one for your family. Here are some ideas, from a Montessori perspective, that we hope will be of some help as you think through this issue.

### The Benefits of Sucking

Babies begin to exercise their sucking reflex in the womb. Nature in its infinite wisdom plans everything well: the exercising of the sucking reflex in this first year of their life brings with it many things that are good. Not only food: it strengthens the facial muscles in preparation for that great pillar of social life, the power of communication.

Babies naturally practice this sucking reflex as they drink milk. To suckle at the breast is incredibly effortful, and it is this effort that often results in the baby falling asleep at the breast with that 'drunken sailor' look. There are some babies who seem to have an especially strong sucking need particularly in their 2nd and 3rd month. If bottle-fed, these babies may not experience sufficient sucking time - a bottle is easier to suck from than a breast. They reach their fill quickly, but still need to satisfy their sucking need. If these babies continued sucking on an empty bottle, they could get a 'gassy' stomach.

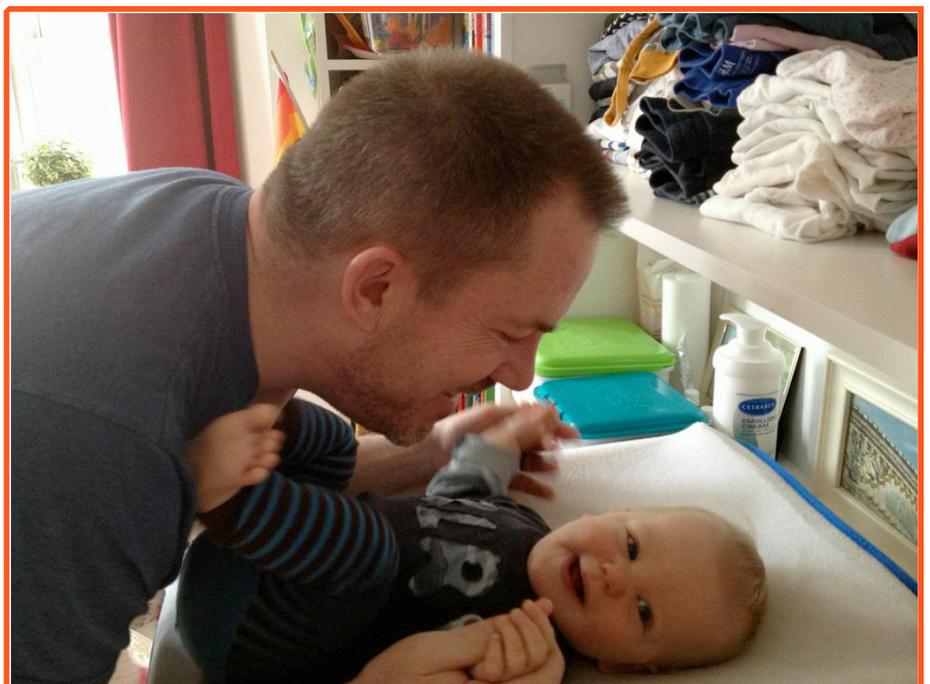
If you feel that your baby has a strong sucking need that has not been satisfied by their suckling from the breast or the bottle, you might consider offering them a dummy for a

small amount of time at the end of the feed, while still holding them as if you were feeding them. Your baby will love to be held in your arms in this way, as they suck on the dummy. When you feel their body relax and the tension of needing to suck dropping away, you can sing a little tune to let them know what is coming next, and then gently remove the dummy from their mouth.

### What I Say is Worthwhile

The earliest messages babies receive are the strongest ones too. For instance, the first 6 weeks determine to a large extent how they feel about their world: 'Is this a good place? Am I welcome here?' It seems impossibly early, yet the study of psychology over the past 100 years informs us that the earliest messages of our childhood are carried right through life. What are some messages we wish to offer to our children?

Perhaps one message we wish to offer them is that what they have to say is important. When they go 'aaa' we go 'aaa' or if we are out of sight we might



say 'I'm over here!'. This interaction is like a dance, a dance that involves our voices, our eyes, our face. It is a dance that centres around the sounds that your little one is making. And so it depends on them having their mouth free to express themselves.

It is this dance of communication that gives your baby the message: 'What I say is worthwhile' and: 'Who I am is worthwhile'. The confidence your baby feels in the value of what they have to say encourages them to say more. The more they say, the more they are able to say; and thus they build the foundations of language. More than vocabulary, in this dance they develop a deep faith in the power of communication, and a deep trust in their ability to communicate. It sets the stage for a harmonious relationship with your child that you will both treasure for the rest of your lives.

Time they spend with a dummy in their mouth is time taken away from such experiences. Can we ever bring back the first year of life? Time is so precious.

### The Idea of Human Relationship

The fact is that dummies are most often given to babies to stop them crying. When babies cry there is always a reason, whether it is apparent to us or not. Over time we get better and better at understanding what our baby is trying to say. But early in that relationship, and at times later on, we may find it difficult to know why they are crying. It can be so painful to hear their crying and not to know what to do. It can be incredibly hard to just be with them through their crying, hard as it is, confessing to them that we wish we could understand what they were saying.

Yet when we do that perhaps they get the message, even as they cry, that 'People try to understand me'. Perhaps they see human relationship as a beautiful thing, through good times and bad. When a dummy is put into their mouth, they may get another message: 'People don't like it when I cry'. They may see human relationship as something to turn to when all is well, but *objects* as more reliable when in pain.

### Good Habits From The Start

Babies come into the world with an extraordinary sensitivity and intelligence, which they use to adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves. They learn habits quickly – good or bad. If a dummy is offered when a baby cries, they learn to expect the dummy when they cry, and very quickly the idea of 'oral gratification' crowds out the many other possible responses to a crying child.

« When a dummy is put in their mouth babies get the message that people don't like it when I cry »»

The habit of oral gratification becomes developed faster than one would think: very soon a baby born without a rubber pacifier starts to spend quite a lot of time with one in their mouth. Without meaning to, we may be giving our child the message that oral gratification is better than a view of the leaves moving in the breeze, better than the sound of their father singing, better than a red ribbon to explore with their hands.

The more time a baby spends with a dummy, the more likely it will be incorporated into their body scheme – a mental image of their body in space, built in that first year of life. Neurologically speaking, they may start to feel 'incomplete' or simply uneasy without something in their mouth. Gradually that great function of the mouth, which is to be the gateway for expression of the human soul, can become secondary to a need for oral gratification. Psychologically, the attitude can shift from feeling that one has something meaningful to contribute, to feeling that one is here to consume.

### Related Issues

Staff in some hospitals may recommend you use a dummy to put your baby to sleep. There is some evidence that going to sleep with a dummy can reduce the risk of SIDS. Our experience with putting children to sleep with a dummy is that it can interfere with their sleep rhythms. Sleep takes place in cycles. Each cycle has its own set of important tasks, and our body naturally moves from one stage to the next. Children who fall asleep with a dummy may learn to suck on it to move between stages. What happens when the dummy falls out of their mouth, or when they are weaned off it? If they have not developed the ability to naturally cycle back from light to deep sleep, their body's exquisite machinery may not get a chance to work its many miracles that take place as we sleep.

The research is ambiguous on the impact of dummy use on breastfeeding, but one thing is certain: at best the use of a dummy does not increase the likelihood of successful breastfeeding and at worst – for instance if used in the first month – it leads to its cessation. The research is clearer on the negative

event of your child using a dummy beyond age 4, the increase in risk it presents of your child developing a minor ear infection between age 2-3, and the possibility it creates of an early discharge from hospital for pre-term babies.

## In Conclusion

Our practical experience is that the use of a dummy at some point in the day almost always leads to its use at other points in the day, until gradually it becomes an essential part of your baby's life. In the event that the circumstances of your family compel you to offer a dummy to your child, we suggest two simple guidelines. One, that your baby always be in your arms with you looking at them while they have a dummy in their mouth. Two, that you plan for when and how you will wean your baby off it.

Many parents will find their commitment to not using a dummy tested over the first few months of their baby's life. You are more likely to succeed if you consider some of the ideas suggested at



[www.aidtolife.org](http://www.aidtolife.org) to help meet your baby's need for movement, for independence, and for language - needs that begin at birth, and even before.

## Research on dummy use shows it has impact on four areas:

### ***Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)***

Several studies show that using a pacifier can decrease the risk of SIDS by up to 60%. The exact mechanism by which this happens is as yet unknown. One study suggests that babies somehow get better at managing the breathing process while asleep (autonomic control) while another suggests that babies who are offered a dummy do not sleep as deeply as those who sleep without a dummy. Two studies found that dummies can actually *increase* the risk of SIDS if they are used inconsistently. That is, if babies are habitually put to sleep with a dummy, their not having a dummy puts them at higher risk compared to babies who have never been put to sleep with a dummy.

### ***Breastfeeding***

Observational studies suggest that the use of a dummy is linked to reduced breastfeeding duration, although one study suggests there is good reason to think that using a dummy does not *cause* this reduction but is just associated with it. The advice offered by the American Academy of Paediatricians is that a dummy should not be offered until after breastfeeding is well established.

### ***Dental health***

Research on the impact of dummy use on dental health is rather dated. The few studies that have been published suggest that dental malocclusions - the way the upper and lower set of teeth fit together - are more commonly found amongst dummy users, especially if the dummy is used beyond age 3.

### ***ENT health***

Using a dummy, particularly between 2-3 years of age, is associated with a 1.2 to 2-fold increase in risk of a middle-ear infection called otitis media (glue ear). The negative impact otitis media has on language development is negligible.

## Born Inside

*Louise Livingston interviews **Beverley Maragh** about her work on the 'Born Inside' project in Holloway Prison, which is run and supported by the Maria Montessori Institute.*

The United Kingdom has the highest rate of female imprisonment in the European Union and around three quarters of these female UK prisoners have been given custodial sentences for non-violent crimes, of these, two thirds have dependent children under the age of 18. In other words half of the women in prison for non-violent crimes are mothers and consequently more than 17,000 children are separated from their mothers by the prison system in any given year.

This enforced separation is exacerbated by the fact that one in seven women has difficulty ensuring that her children are looked after during her time in prison. Of the 4,144 women currently in prison in the UK 700 are held more than 100 miles from their homes. It is estimated that only half of the women who were in contact with their children before imprisonment will receive a visit from them during the period of sentencing.

The fate of a child whose mother is convicted and sentenced will vary according to the care arrangements that are made but the charity Barnados reports that 'Children who have a parent in prison are three times more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour' and that 'Statistics indicate that children of prisoners are more likely to be incarcerated in adulthood than other children.'

But this is not all, approximately two babies per week are 'born inside', into a prison system that has

a grand total of around 80 'mother and baby' places available. There are 14 women's prisons in England and none in Wales and of these only seven prisons have 'mother and baby' units. Two of them can care for children up to 18 months old and the remaining 5 can only care for children up to 9 months. Holloway Prison in North London is the largest women's prison in the UK and it has a 'mother and baby' unit with 13 places for babies up to the age of 9 months. It is here that the Maria Montessori Institute has established a programme called 'Born Inside - Holloway Prison' inspired by the AMI 'Educatours sans Frontières' programme and working in collaboration with psychotherapist Pamela Stewart. This work is made profoundly difficult due to the nature of imprisonment - as Pamela puts it, 'Often these women are frightened to bond with their child, even while they are pregnant, because they know that the child is going to be taken away from them.'

This is the starting point for the collaboration between Beverley Maragh from the Maria Montessori Institute and Pamela Stewart. Their programme is designed to support pregnant and new mothers and babies using Montessori principles and drawing on the resources of the Aid to Life Project ([www.aidtolife.org](http://www.aidtolife.org)).

I had the opportunity to ask Beverley some questions about the work she is doing:

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*Beverley, how often do you visit the 'mother and baby' unit at Holloway Prison?*

We meet once a week, year round and spend about half a day in the prison.

*What are you hoping to achieve through these sessions?*

We help the mothers gain insight into the developmental needs of their babies and to understand what they can do to support them. Our intention is to make them aware of the positive impact they can have on the lives of their babies even in an unnatural environment such as prison. We also try to gain their trust so that we can encourage them to think about their own

lives, the experiences that brought them into their current situation and what they can do to avoid being separated from their children in the future.

*Tell us something about the work that you are doing?*

There are 12 cells on the 'mother and baby' unit. The mothers vary in age from 18 to 46 and come

from a wide range of cultures. All of the babies are under 9 months, after that, they may be transferred to another prison unit which cares for children up to eighteen months, if there is space available. In some cases the babies may be given to other members of their family. These separations are traumatising for the mothers and their babies.

In addition to working with mothers once they have given birth we also work with women who are pregnant leading up to the birth. In some cases the women will transfer to the 'mother and baby' unit. In other cases they may have opted not to sit in front of the Admissions Board for access to the 'mother and baby' unit or they may have been refused a place on the unit. In these cases separation takes place at birth and we continue to support these women, usually meeting with them and talking about ways in which they may be able to keep in contact with the child.

*What is the most challenging aspect of this work?*

There are many challenges for all of us. The women themselves have already experienced a number of challenges in their own lives and having a baby in

prison presents yet more complications for them to have to deal with. The women have difficulty developing trust in each other and this is a crucial issue for us to deal with. Beyond this we help them to realise that, in spite of their surroundings, they can take responsibility for creating a positive nurturing environment, which will help the growth and development of their babies. Daily life, of necessity, is dictated by the rules and regulations of the prison and this can also have its challenges. For example, recently there was an outbreak of chicken pox on the unit and everyone in the unit was quarantined. This meant that all transfers out of the unit were delayed for 8 weeks causing a dispiriting lowering of morale.

*What kind of work are you managing to do to help the babies?*

Our work has centred around physical care, breastfeeding, weaning, sleeping and encouraging the development of communication and spoken language. We also show the mothers how to create play materials and how to create a 'prepared environment' conducive to promoting co-ordinated movement and levels

of independence in the babies. These simple but profound improvements will significantly increase the life-chances of these little children.

We encourage the mothers to let the babies lie freely on the rugs we have brought in and it takes time for them to feel comfortable enough to place the babies on the rugs so that they can move freely. The mothers are often amazed at what their children are capable of – watching their baby roll over for the first time or reach out for a toy can serve as a source of pride in their child's achievements.

We encourage them to allow their babies to explore and not to rush to every cry or sound with an offer of food. It has been a challenge to overcome the idea that a quiet baby equals a good baby. In the beginning babies were encouraged to sleep and many remained in their prams with a cover over the hood to keep them from being disturbed. Little by little the mothers also begin to reflect on the impact that their own personal experiences have had, not only on their current situation but also on their own expectations of motherhood.

*It sounds like it is difficult to establish trusting relationships. What kind of progress are you able to make?*

We have a group space and we encourage a great deal of discussion and reflection. For instance we encourage them to listen to the way they communicate with one another and to consider the impact their abrupt words and tone might have on their babies. When we ask them how they resolve misunderstanding and conflict in their own families we usually discover a wide range of responses. Certainly, we create a safe space for each



to express her thoughts and experiences in the knowledge that we will respect their privacy and will operate confidentially unless given permission otherwise. Our non-judgemental approach and genuine interest in their relationship with their baby is always helpful.

We have also talked about the importance of breast-feeding in the early days both nutritionally and as a way of bonding and providing the beginnings of a healthy relationship. Many of the mothers have begun breast-feeding and some have continued. Others, depending upon circumstances, may stop or change to breast and bottle at around 8 weeks. When the children are around 5 months of age we begin to talk about weaning and the introduction of solids.

*I understand you are modelling the programme of the Aid to Life initiative. What aspects and resources have you found helpful?*

We have worked with the women on the nature of the communication they have with their babies. We encourage them to hold the babies face to face and talk directly to them. The importance of reading to their babies and singing and rhyming is both modelled and discussed. Together we have watched the Aid to Life DVD on Communication and since then we have noticed the women giving more attention to the sounds their babies make and singing and talking to their babies much more calmly. The surrounding environment on the unit is often very noisy with different radio and television stations playing in the cells. This has given us an opportunity to talk about the impact over-exposure to noise and technology may have on their baby's development.

## « We encourage them to consider the impact their abrupt words and tone might have on their babies »

Not only do we concentrate on the importance of movement for the child's development by providing a large sheet, some tiny soft toys, very small rattles, soft balls and rings which are placed on the mat a few at a time but we also talk about the importance of clothing and explain how certain types of clothing can be restricting for the children. For example it took some time to persuade the mothers not to put socks on the babies feet when they were on the movement sheet. They were concerned that they would be acting irresponsibly if the babies' feet were to get cold.

We also provide a range of mobiles for the children to look at that are interesting and developmentally appropriate. Seeing the toys on the mat for the first time, two of the babies attempted to roll. It took a while for the mums to realise that this was a really positive action from the babies and not an act of disobedience. While the babies were on the floor the mothers also came and sat on the floor and little by little they were so interested in what the babies were doing that they began to focus on the babies and not themselves. It took a short time before they were interacting with the babies and showing them the toys. We showed the mothers how to place things a little beyond the reach of the babies from time to time and they were amazed to see the positive effort their baby would display in trying to move towards the toy. In the beginning, one baby just lay there the whole time till she fell asleep. Another began to cry

but we encouraged the mother to speak reassuringly to her baby and she was surprised and pleased that her baby stopped crying.

The following week we brought in another softer blanket for the floor for the younger babies who were then also placed on the floor. At first one of them began to cry but once reassured lay on the floor on his tummy. Then he began to lift his head up and look round. Then another mother placed her 6-week-old baby on the mat and sat and talked to him when he looked up at her. The baby who had only fallen asleep the week before was making some attempt to roll over and the fretful baby who had not been too sure of being left on the mat was rolling from her back to her tummy and back again.

Until our visits, opportunities for movement had been very limited, as the babies had either been held by their mothers, pushed around in buggies or kept in 'bouncers'. It made us think that in these ways the babies had been kept in a non-moving prison of their own. The mothers were learning how easy it is to create a space for babies and how to encourage them to be in motion by using simple inexpensive everyday objects. The good news is that the mothers have now said they have been using the movement sheets whilst we're not there.

*I understand that you are trying to also apply the Montessori principle of 'help me to help myself' in your approach with the mothers.*

Yes. We have asked the women to think how they could arrange the room in such a way that supports the interests and needs of the babies. A mirror on the floor is an endless source of interest. They are also encouraged to think of simple, inexpensive toys that will encourage movement and language development. One of our major goals is to encourage the mothers to think for themselves in making best use of their environment and their time with their babies. It is counter-productive to try and impose our own ideas on them but through communication and respect and a consistent reliable presence we are beginning to see the women respond and even prepare the room in advance for the session. They are also keen to share what their babies have achieved in the intervening week and show much more confidence in their children. We hope that this will stand them in very good stead upon release where they will no longer have the support and security of the prison staff 24 hours a day or our visits.

The one main thing that has been established within the group is a level of trust. When we say we will try to find out some information for them we always follow through.

*Presumably there are other support mechanisms for this mothers and babies too?*

Yes, part of our role is to empower the women to contact other agencies to resolve their own issues. In prison they become dependent and institutionalised very quickly. We have worked with them on the idea that they will need to be pro-active when they are released to find support in the community. We work closely with the following agencies: Hibiscus – a programme for foreign national women, which gives them help with immigration



issues. Many of the foreign nationals will face deportation upon their release; Care Confidential – an organisation, which helps with dealing with loss of children to adoption and fostering; St Mungos – offering help for the homeless; Birth Companions who offer anti natal classes and will sometimes attend the birth as a ‘birth supporter’ and Women in Prison – also offering education, training and practical support for women who have been or are in prison. They also receive individual psychotherapy and other educational opportunities in Holloway prison to encourage them to use their time productively while they are in prison. These courses range from vocational courses, such as beauty and hairdressing to Open University courses or English language courses for those with little or no English.

*It seems like this is very challenging work. Are you making progress?*

The prison is a very complex organisation and it takes a lot of time and patience but we are seeing positive signs. The potential benefits are immense, not only will the babies get a better start in life but the mothers will have a higher level

of competence when released and we believe that over time there will be a reduction in reoffending.

We feel we are making real progress. Over the past year we have developed good relationships with the prison staff and the women. We continue to encourage the mothers to think about their babies and to think about what is going on in the baby’s mind. They are beginning to see their babies as individuals with unique personalities with needs of their own.

This work is only possible once the women trust us and we have to work hard to gain their respect. By modelling respect for the mothers and a willingness to listen to them and by paying attention to the babies it seems that the mothers pick up on this and are now more able to do the above for their babies.

It has been interesting to observe how the mothers have become much more relaxed about their babies and now when we arrive they want to tell us what they have been doing with them or what the babies can now do. It wasn’t like this in the beginning. The mothers have even started to go swimming

## « Slowly but surely we have seen a change in attitude from the mothers - they have come to understand that the babies need them to interact in order to help their development »»

with the babies on Sunday mornings.

The mothers whose children have begun to wean have helped each other in experimenting with a greater variety of foods, they have tried different tastes for the babies and are much more interested in nutritional issues. In those instances where we had the opportunity to spend time with the women before the birth we noticed an especially high level of trust emerged and those mothers were particularly open to our suggestions.

Slowly but surely we have seen a change in attitude from the mothers, they have come to understand that the babies need them to interact in order to help their development. It is a subtle change and it helps the mums value themselves, this in turn changes their responses to the children and a virtuous circle is begun.

In the beginning a child that was striving to be active or to do something was seen as 'naughty' or causing difficulty - sleeping and inactivity were the preferred state for the babies. Now they realise they need to be active and engaged.

It was interesting for us to witness how a mother who was feeling low would unknowingly elicit a response in her baby of inactivity and

sleep whereas activity and engagement with the babies created greater harmony amongst the mums.

We have seen how the mothers have conquered their anxieties and have developed a trust in their babies and now speak positively about supporting and caring for them.

I think the constancy of our presence, our patience and honesty has created a secure and safe psychological environment. The mums have then witnessed for themselves that what we said could happen did happen and so over time we gained their trust and this has led to many conversations about the positive changes and hopes they have for their lives when they are

Some have begun to talk about how they regret their crimes and do not want to come back to prison again. They also recognise what they stand to lose if they find themselves back in prison as next time they will not have the opportunity to be with their children.

I was really touched recently while waiting for a bus in Oxford Street. A woman approached me pushing a pram and I realised it was one of our mums who had been released. She wanted me to know that she was doing well, and of course how well the baby was progressing and how grateful she was for what we had shown her. She also told me that she never again wanted to find herself on the inside of a prison.

**So far this project has been funded entirely by the Maria Montessori Institute. Its future is dependent on additional contributions being found. If you would like to make even a small donation please contact [info@mariamontessori.org](mailto:info@mariamontessori.org)**

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# Regulars

## Yesterday's Discoveries Today's Science

### Rote Learning - Been there, done that!

Michael Gove's plans for curriculum reform have people up in arms. If the reported proposals are implemented, children will experience a phonics language curriculum and reading assessment test at age 5. At age 6 they must be able to count to 100, recognise basic fractions and memorise simple sums. By Year Two, they are required to learn by rote their 2, 5, and 10 times tables; by age 9 their 12 times tables, and by age 11 have knowledge of algebra. There is an emphasis on rote learning of facts - from mathematical combinations to poetry, from modal verbs to historical dates, key personalities and events. [1]

Among the debates that are raging about the proposal's different aspects, a recurring accusation appears to have arisen that anyone critical of the reforms are 'left-leaning academics' or fluffy headed proponents for progressive education. [2]

Margaret Brown, Professor of Mathematics at King's College London, describes the prejudice: 'It has become conventional, at least in Anglo-Saxon countries, for aspiring or recently elected governments to claim, first, that educational standards are low in comparison to other countries, and second, that this terrible state of affairs has been caused by the capitulation of the previous administration to progressivism, probably arising from 'the educational establishment'. The obvious treatment for this condition is government insistence on measures that guarantee a return to traditional teaching and learning.' [3]

This is a trend that crosses party politics. In 1999 in a commentary entitled 'Moaners Who are Cheating Your Children' David Blunkett wrote 'Yet there still remain the doubters to whom these traditional methods remain anathema. I still encounter those in the education world who would prefer the quiet life of the past, where education was 'progressive' and where failure of half our pupils was taken for granted.' [4]

Media often joins the attack: The 'spellings, facts and rules' that these clever fools are attacking have another name - an education. Without spellings, facts and rules, you aren't educated. Instead, you're left floundering in a knowledge-free vacuum, barely comforted by the progressive lie that ignorance somehow magically generates thought. [5]



Perhaps those who pay a visit to a Montessori Children's House to view the 'progressive lie' in action would be bemused to find that instead of the 'knowledge-free vacuum', children are involved in academically challenging work. One child is engrossed in performing subtraction with fractions, and another with counting beads on the thousand chain. At a floor mat nearby, friends decide to label a self-constructed map of Africa with its countries and capitals. A 5-year-old has chosen to spend over an hour working out the 2, 4, 6, and 8 times tables, beside another 5 year old skip counting to arrive at the cube of 6. Around the corner a small group of 3-4 year olds delightedly recite a poem from memory, and an older child is showing a younger classmate how to build a sensorial representation of the algebraic equation  $(a+b+c)^3$ . The children explore botanical classification, record results of science experiments, deepen their understanding of grammar, develop an ear for music and tackle the decimal system.

Proponents of Michael Gove's reforms defend them as necessary to enable children from the poorest backgrounds to succeed and for the advancement of civilisation as a whole. [6] In all she offered to the early years, Maria Montessori had the same aim. However, her understanding of education as an aid to life, as revealed in her discussion of 'World Illiteracy', reveals the necessary ingredients to truly beneficial academic achievement.

'Ignorance is even more fatal to man than is undernourishment or poverty. Many people think that respect for the child and consideration for his psychical life means leaving the child alone, in inertia, i.e. without any mental activity. On the contrary, when the natural energies are taken as the basis, or in other words, when the plan of education follows the special psychology of the development of man, not only is rapid and extensive progress made, but an intensification of personal values realised.' [7]

Maria Montessori observed how much children are capable of understanding, developing and achieving in these early years - far beyond what was believed of them at the time. She discovered that contrary to popular belief, children are capable of absorbing an incredible body of knowledge, even children from tremendously deprived backgrounds.

But most significantly, she observed that when adults force the accumulation of knowledge on children through imposed rote learning - describing such methods as 'slavery' [8] - education fails to improve quality of life, and often has a negative impact. Only when knowledge is gained through active engagement with an environment prepared to respond to the developmental needs of each age does it become truly constructive to human life. She observed that when children connect with an environment that answers the developmental imperatives of their age, immense academic progress is accompanied by maturation of character and a deep love for challenging, meaningful work.

Though Maria Montessori grasped the importance, both to the individual child and to collective humanity, of academic learning, she discerned that the manner by which this academic learning is achieved is of equal importance. This understanding of the fullness of human potential to be gained by respecting child development runs throughout all aspects of her method: in enabling a child to gain literacy not through dry, stale readers but an intertwining of written language with spoken language; in the concrete maths materials that recognise the child's seeking for order, pattern, connections and relationships; in the reading practice that honours the young child's need for movement; in the cultural activities in such varied disciplines as botany, geography, music, and zoology that all respond to the sensorial learner of the early years; in the respect for each child's concentration, constructive choices, interests, internal motivation, and rhythm of work.

This is the approach that the supporters of 'increasing cognitive ability at all costs' are highly suspicious of. In their minds, it is either impossible or inefficient to achieve these high intellectual standards through any way other than rote learning.

As voiced by India Knight in her article 'The Three Rs: Reading, Writing and Rubbing out the Leftie Ideas Holding Children Back' 'There is nothing wrong with learning by rote, and there is no other efficient way of learning times tables or spelling. I went to a French school and we used to sit for hours memorising the more complicated conjugations because there is no other way of doing it. Did we understand why certain verbs suddenly conjugated in apparently inexplicable ways? No, of course not. Did it matter? No. Why should it? We weren't learning to be professors of linguistics. We were 10-

year-old children learning French. And we did, merci. [9]

In 'How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity and the Hidden Power of Character', author Paul Tough describes a modern culture 'saturated with an idea you might call the cognitive hypothesis: the belief, rarely expressed aloud but commonly held nonetheless, that success today depends primarily on cognitive skills . . . and that the best way to develop these skills is to practice them as much as possible, beginning as early as possible.' [10]

It is no surprise then, that the 100 leading academics, including university professors from Oxford, Cambridge and Kings College London, who wrote an open letter to the Daily Telegraph critical of the 'mountain of facts' Gove's curriculum will force children to memorise, were vociferously attacked as prizing ignorance and being overly absorbed with character development. [11]

But from over 100 years ago to the present day, Montessori schools show that academic achievement and character development develop together and enrich each other, if we follow the child. Seekers of hard evidence can find it in Angeline Lillard's 2006 study, published in the journal Science: children who attended a Montessori school had not only significantly higher cognitive and academic skills, but social and behavioural skills as well. [12]



Some may argue that such holistic learning experiences are a luxury, an added bonus for the privileged few, while the rest of children, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, will benefit sufficiently from an education focused on academic achievement. But a rich body of current research in neuroscience and learning on Executive Functions [13], on the impact of emotion on cognitive learning [14], on the link between cognitive, emotional and social capacities [15] reiterates the need to move beyond the thinking that attempting to stuff information into a child's brain will improve quality of life.

Among the wide range of research into meaningful learning, one of the most striking is that worked on by an economist at the University of Chicago, James Heckman. His interests have expanded into studying personality psychology, medicine and genetics. In the late 1990s, he had worked on the General Educational Development program (GED), which awards teenagers with the equivalent of a high school diploma if they pass a test that certifies they have the knowledge and cognitive skills commensurate to that of a high school graduate. It continues to be a popular, fast-track way to a qualification, that provides particularly low income minority students with the right level of intellectual knowledge, access to a college education and presumably a better life. Heckman went on, however to study the long-term results of the programme, looking at the lifetime achievements of GED recipients. He found that while scores on the achievement tests showed that GED holders had the same amount of academic knowledge as high school graduates, their life achievements were vastly different. Only 3% of GED recipients went on to complete a post-secondary degree, and statistics on annual income, unemployment rate, divorce and use of illegal drugs showed a striking similarity with those of high school dropouts, despite the GED qualification that proves they have considerably greater intellectual knowledge and skills. 'For Heckman, the results posed a confounding intellectual puzzle. Like most economists, Heckman had believed that cognitive ability was the single most reliable determinant of how a person's life would turn out. Now he had discovered a group - GED holders - whose academic achievement test scores didn't seem to have any positive effect on their lives.' Heckman reached the conclusion that what matters, instead, is a very different set of qualities - persistence, the ability to delay gratification, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, drive, discipline, self-confidence - what he labelled as non-cognitive skills, that the rest of us usually think of as character.

Heckman examined the results of the Perry Preschool, a 1960s study where recruited children were randomly assigned to either the treatment or

control group. The children in the treatment group received a preschool education, and the children in the control group did not. They were then tracked in an on-going study that will continue to follow them for the rest of their lives. The Perry Preschool Project was initially regarded as a failure, since by 3rd grade, the treatment group academic achievement scores were no higher than that of the control group. However, the difference in life outcomes was marked: compared to the control group, Perry students were 'more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to be employed at age 27, more likely to be earning more than 25,000 dollars a year at age 40, less likely to ever have been arrested, and less likely to have spent time on welfare.' [16]

Sixty years later, Maria Montessori's words are just as timely in communicating the need to reflect on what makes education an aid to life: '. . . although education is recognised as one of the ways of raising mankind, it is nevertheless, still and only, thought of as an education of the mind....And if education is always to be conceived along the same antiquated lines of a mere transmission of knowledge, there is little to be hoped from it in the bettering of man's future. For what is the use of transmitting knowledge if the individual's total development lags behind?' [17]

## Lori Woellhaf

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## Dear Maria...

### Is music an essential part of children's education?

*The UK Association for Music Education has submitted its comments to the Department for Education on the reform of the National Curriculum. While there is positive comment on the freedom that teachers of music will have to shape their own curriculum, there is also a recommendation that the curriculum be modified further to encourage more active participation by children; that the purpose of study be defined as follows: 'Pupils should leave school with an understanding of how music is composed and performed across a wide range of styles and genres, allowing them to participate creatively in music and to listen with discrimination and judgement to the best in the music canon.'* [1] *What did Maria Montessori write about the role of music in education?*



Montessori has written about instances of children having intense musical experiences. A child in a Children's House played a scale on eight bells over two hundred times in succession. [2] Five little girls embraced each other and smothered the teacher with kisses after learning a few new movements of a rhythmic dance. [3] On another occasion children aged six to twelve were observed listening so attentively to music played on the piano that they remained quite motionless apart from assuming various poses with their arms. [4] Montessori summarised how young children delight in listening to music:

'on the faces of the children appears the interior working of a spirit, tasting a nectar essential to its very life.' [5]

These observations led her to recommend that this natural enthusiasm for music be nurtured through education. She blamed the low attendance levels of concerts in the public squares on a lack of musical education, saying that 'the ear of the uneducated man cannot perceive the sublime sounds which music would bring within his reach'. [6] Allocating some educational activities to music would not only

result in adults able to appreciate music, but would also contribute to 'a healthful, spiritual upbuilding - a beautiful orderliness which is being established within them.' [7] Montessori advised that the development of musical intelligence be twofold: 'our object must be the creation not merely of higher and higher grades of understanding, but also of higher and higher grades of *feeling*.' [8] She placed great importance on this responsibility:

'We must content ourselves with assuming an obligation: with giving all the soul and all the skill we possess. We must conceive of ourselves as transmitters of the largess of music to our children. We must deeply feel our calling as bestowers of a divine gift.' [9]

Montessori viewed musical education in the Children's House as an introduction to music, with emphasis on giving a positive impression, which might stimulate future learning. She noted that 'success here depends to a great extent upon having a child hear a good deal of music.' [10] Musical activities are divided into three groups: rhythmic movement, playing musical instruments and writing music.

Opportunity for rhythmic movement is incorporated into classroom activities such as that of Walking on the Line. In this activity a group of children walk around an elliptical line on the floor, thus improving their balance and control over their movements. They learn to be patient with someone who moves slowly ahead of them and polite to someone who rushes them from behind. While they walk background music can be played; initially a simple march that encourages a steady pace and later, once the children have acquired some balance, a variety of rhythms. Montessori noted that

‘Children feel the rhythm of music played with feeling, and they often follow it not only with their feet, but also with their arms and bodies.’ [11]

She described how a boy of only three years used to change his style of walking on the line according to the change in music played; not just his pace, but also his poise:

‘Considered as evidence of a mental state, the change in demeanour bears witness to a distinct artistic experience. The composer of the tune could well be proud of such a sincere response to his work, if the test of musical beauty be regarded as successful communication of feeling.’ [12]

Music can be introduced in conjunction with the changing elements of the environment. If a book about animals is placed in the Book Corner, ‘Carnival of the Animals’ by Camille Saint-Saëns could be played after reading the book to a group; the children could guess which animals are represented and could move to mimic the style of each animal. Very young children interested in insects could listen to ‘The Flight of the Bumble Bee’ composed by Rimskij-Korsakov before then guessing which insect the piece is about and which instrument is being played. Frequently, group activities include some singing.

Cards are made containing images such as wind instruments or English composers, for example. These images simply stimulate conversation with younger children or offer children who read the chance to find out more. Additionally, the children are treated to performances of pieces using different instruments. Watching and listening to live music on a real instrument is an inspiring experience for children of all ages, who become motivated to play for themselves. Even the worst busker has a magnetic effect on the tiniest child! Montessori suggested that a child will learn about melody if he has access to

‘simple instruments adapted to his size and potentialities and if he is left free to use them, without being hindered by too many technicalities. When such instruments are available, a child is given a few brief lessons, or introductions, on how to use them, like those which he receives for the use of other materials. This puts him in the position of being able to play by himself; and, because of the simplicity of the instruments, he derives a continually increasing interest in them.’ [13]

Instruments such as a tambourine enable even the youngest children to learn how to play a beat and once they have gained this ability they gain great pleasure from accompanying an adult playing on a more sophisticated instrument. Specifically, Montessori advocated the introduction of a set of eight bells to represent the whole tones of one octave. Activities based on matching, comparing and sequencing the Bells aid the children to perceive differences in musical sounds and at a later stage play basic rhythms. From this sensorial base children can be given the names of notes and are led to compose and then read music in the same way as they are helped to write and then read with the use of the Sandpaper Letters and the Moveable Alphabet.

In one of her books, Montessori dedicated five chapters to the subject of education of music; it is clear that it holds a valuable role in her methodology. She wanted to bring music into the classroom in such a way as to arouse the children’s interest and only then offer opportunity for exploration and learning. She observed a love of music already present in the youngest children and as such viewed music as inherent in our culture; education as an aid to life must include music:

‘A composer or musician might well esteem it a privilege some day to hear it said of his work that it aroused the first love for music in the hearts of one of these little ones.’ [14]



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