

THE E-ZINE FOR MONTESSORI PROFESSIONALS

informed

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Hello

This issue is the last issue of Informed in 2008. The e-zine has a range of articles from Montessori leadership to reflections on classroom practice.



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EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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Reflections on 2008

Montessori Near You in 2008 July-November, in six centres around NZ

This workshop was held in six centres around NZ in 2008. More than 130 teachers attended the one-day workshop and we have heard of exciting changes that Montessori teachers are making to ensure children have valuable experiences outdoors. The feedback from all participants has been enthusiastic and positive. Bronwyn Norman, workshop leader, reflects 'I am grateful for the opportunity to grow and to contribute back to Montessori in an aspect of teaching and learning that I fully connect to; children in nature.' Many thanks to Bronwyn for taking on the challenge of leading the workshops; I know many of you would appreciate the work needed to create a workshop and the skills needed to effectively lead a group of adults. Thanks also to all the Montessori centres, schools, staff and parents who hosted the workshops: Wa Ora Montessori, Cambridge Montessori, Kowhai Montessori, Titoki Montessori, Wanganui Montessori and Nova Montessori.

What's On For Montessori professionals in 2009?



2009 MANZ Primary Retreat

Silverstream Retreat, Upper Hutt. Friday April 3 6pm - Sunday April 5th, 4pm.

The retreat will focus on classroom management for Montessori 6-12 teachers. Led by Kristen Taylor, Montessori at Moturoa, New Plymouth participants will find answers to a range of questions facing Montessori primary teachers. The retreat will be a combination of presentations and discussion groups. The retreat style will give opportunities to network with colleagues. The workshop is open to any interested Montessori teachers and parents. Flyers were sent in October to all Montessori primary trusts. If you need a flyer to register please email: eo@montessori.org.nz

MANZ is busy planning a vibrant Montessori professional development programme for 2009.

2009 MANZ Montessori Leaders Retreat

In 2009 MANZ is planning a retreat for Montessori professionals in leadership positions in their centre: owners, managers, administrators and teachers. It will be a time to participate in workshops, to network, share ideas and find solutions to common challenges. The retreat will also be a time to relax, recharge and reinvigorate yourself for the tasks you undertake. Members have been asked to send feedback so that MANZ can plan an event that: meets the needs of 'leaders', occurs at a time of year that suits you and is in an accessible place. Details will be sent in early 2009.

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Montessori 101 - a time of reflection!

by Pauline Norris.



In September, 2008 a workshop was held for early childhood teachers working in Montessori early childhood centres in NZ. Twenty-eight early childhood teachers and one primary teacher attended the workshop, led by Amy Kirkham, AMI trainer from Melbourne.

This workshop was aimed at early childhood-trained educators who are now working in Montessori classrooms and were keen to develop their skills and knowledge to be more effective teachers in this environment.

That's the background, now here's what happened..... We came from all over New Zealand; we were 29 eager early childhood teachers, full of expectation of the wonderful learning that was going to take place that would

transform us into Montessori practitioners. The workshop leader Amy Kirkham, AMI trainer from Melbourne was inspirational, controversial, funny and brilliant! It was on the second day in the morning that Amy dropped the real bombshell that we should not be presenting any work to the children as unqualified Montessori teachers. Our jaws dropped, as we were experienced teachers and no doubt back at our respective schools had been doing the occasional presentation; no problem. But Amy then went on to totally convince us why we shouldn't be presenting because although we may know the 'mechanics' of presenting work we wouldn't know the theory behind it and where it fits in with the progression of the child's work, and more importantly if the child is ready. By the end of the week we were all either seriously thinking

about how we could become qualified Montessori teachers or had already booked our courses. We had got the message.

However, Amy did give us plenty of encouragement to be useful teachers in the Montessori classroom by informing us we could do redirecting and most importantly be doing extension work with the children. We then proceeded to be given a lightening overview of all the Montessori work areas with special emphasis on extension work. I really enjoyed the practical hands-on explanation of all the materials especially the bead cabinet in the mathematics area. Now at least I know what everything is called. Even if I can't present it, I can look a little more professional in front of the children.

The controversial side of Amy came into the forefront when demonstrating some of the work; she challenged ideas about why things had to be done in a certain way if there was no valid reason for them to be done so. Amy's message was that there is room for flexibility and children can be creative with materials as long as they treat them with respect and know their correct use and the purpose is being met. It's okay for the child to make a tower out of the Broad Stairs!

Well done Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand for offering this workshop; it has stirred up all participants into actions of various kinds, keep spreading the word - we will.

Pauline Norris, Kowhai Montessori School, Auckland, NZ

After attending the Montessori 101 workshop Pauline has signed up for Post Graduate Diploma in Montessori Education at Auckland University of Technology. She starts in March 2009. 'I can't wait!'

Support and Engagement for All Students

by John R. Snyder and Donna Bryant Goertz, Austin Montessori School.



This talk was presented at the North American Montessori Teachers Conference: Montessori and Special Education: A Contemporary Assessment, Austin, Texas, USA in February, 2008. MANZ will be publishing some excerpts from this talk by John Snyder and Donna Bryant Goertz. Donna is planning a trip to NZ in April 2010 where she will be a keynote speaker at the MANZ 2010 Conference.

As a community of practice, we need to hear each other's stories, and we want to tell some of our own this morning. In particular, we were touched by Nimal Vaz's heartfelt lament earlier that so many teachers and schools simply do not want to work with the children that we label 'special needs children'. We hope to give you a word of encouragement about that - to share with you how a longstanding commitment to serving these children and their families has transformed our practice and enriched the experience of every child in our school. Yes, we agree with Nimal and others at this conference that there are no shortcuts, that it is hard, hard work, but it can also be joyful work. It can be transformative work, as transformative as any spiritual discipline we know.

Our Role in the Self-Construction of the Child

The children who came into Maria Montessori's life taught her a number of very important things about the culture of the child and about what they needed from adult culture. The most important message was this: we live to construct ourselves.

This is to say that children are always learning and always creating the pre-conditions for their next learning. Learning is not only natural for children, it is their *raison d'être*, their mode of being. Only under the most heinous conditions of abuse and deprivation can we prevent a child from learning. Montessori relayed the children's message to us: if we adults think we must be responsible for children's learning, we are not only mistaken, but tragically so.

'Adults look upon a child as something empty that is to be filled through their own efforts, as something inert and helpless for which they must do everything, as something lacking an inner guide and in constant need of inner direction. . . . An adult who acts in this way, even though he may be convinced that he is filled with zeal, love, and a spirit of sacrifice on behalf of his child, unconsciously suppresses the development of the child's own personality' (Montessori 1982, p16)

Montessori learned from the children that what they need from adult culture is to be provided a safe, healthy place in which to do their great work of self-construction, the right tools when they have need of them, and the occasional removal of an obstruction too big for them to move themselves. So resilient and compelled to this work are children that they will self-construct even when none of these adult contributions are present, but then the self they construct may bear little resemblance to the blueprint with which they arrived into the world. It may instead resemble a fortress, or a prison, or a shaky hovel swaying dangerously in the slightest breeze.

As Montessorians, we know that the child will self-construct according to the environment they inhabit, whether rich or impoverished, safe or unsafe, pro-social or antisocial.

Too often, we adults feel compelled to intervene in the child's process and become not guardians and removers of obstacles, but project managers of their self-construction. As good project managers, we come to think it is our responsibility to set the timetables for the project, to define project milestones, to require regular progress reports, to be constantly inspecting the construction site, to specify the building materials, and, above all, to see that the construction is proceeding according to 'code' - the external standards of the dominant society.

We do this with the best of intentions. We are filled with zeal, love, and even a spirit of sacrifice or a sense of

Support and Engagement for All Students

by John R. Snyder and Donna Bryant Goertz, Austin Montessori School (continued).

vocation - and then Dr. Montessori intervenes to remind us that we are unconsciously suppressing the development of the child's own personality. A child whose management of his own self-construction is thus usurped may then lose touch with the ability to self-construct, becoming dependent on a succession of adult project managers well into the child's own adulthood.

More's the pity when the result of this kindly usurpation is an adult with no strong inner foundation - a pre-fab building with a cookie cutter floor plan, factory outlet furnishings, and no view. Such a dwelling is no place to house an Einstein, a da Vinci, a Glenn Gould, a Hildegard, an Alan Turing, a Gertrude Stein, an Isaac Newton. It is no place to house anyone who has arrived in the world with the dignity and potential of even the most profoundly challenged child.

In our work with children whose self-construction does not follow the usual blueprints, if we can see that work as the removal of obstacles and the guarding of the individual freedom to self-construct, we are on the right track. As we look for partners inside and outside the Montessori world, we should look for those who have this 'removing obstacles' orientation, those whose philosophy and ways of working leave the child's autonomy intact and who understand the importance of the child's whole environment, recognising that the genius of development is in the child, not in their methods.

Unusual Blueprints: Dennis

Lilia, the Children's House guide, knew just how to work with Dennis. She came to understand that this new child couldn't sit in a gathering with the other primary children, so when they gathered together, Dennis did many other things. He counted the books on the shelf or the pictures on the wall. He checked on the balanced aquarium and took note of each of the fish; he looked for the algae eater; he noticed the amount of algae on the sides; and he noticed the state of the plants. Then he came to the gathering and waited beside Lilia to report to the group.

Dennis set up for lunch even though he was not yet in extended day. He looked out the window to compare the clouds in the sky with the cards of clouds. He checked the temperature on the thermometer. He looked at the puddle on the sidewalk to see if it had shrunk and outlined it with chalk again. Then he came to the gathering to report.

Dennis fetched a certain book or material for Lilia. He went over to observe the progress of the chrysalis, to count how many were left in the larval stage, and saw if they had enough leaves to eat. He came back to Lilia and waited beside her to report to the group. He always carried his special reporter's stool to sit on, which helped him define his role and remember the particularities Lilia had introduced to him about how to carry it out. This worked well as long as Lilia made it a point to think ahead the night before and make a list of ideas for the next day.

Gradually, over the years, Dennis learned to manage his temperament and regulate his emotions. He learned to challenge his unusually high IQ in ways that would benefit him and others. In his last semester in Children's House, Dennis could sit in the gathering. He became the child who could offer ideas to the new child, the one who was unable to sit in the gathering.

Unusual Blueprints: Lena

Lena was 2 ½ when she entered our brand new community in our brand new school, during my very first year as a guide. She quickly assessed the situation and understood that I gave presentations and the children worked with materials at tables or on mats. That was not the way Lena learned, but her nature was to keep to the customs of her community. So, Lena laid out materials very nicely and then circulated quietly but endlessly looking over other children's shoulders at their work. This continued for years, despite my best intentions and interventions to engage her in working with her own hands.

When Lena felt any pressure to sit down and work, she would do so, but just for as long as she felt necessary to

please me. That was not when she learned, because that was not how she learned. Lena would return, as soon as she saw her way clear, to circulating and looking on in rapt attention as other children worked. Lena concentrated deeply, but not at her own work; she concentrated deeply at the work of other children.

As a new guide, I was troubled by this. I took it to be a sign of my lack of experience and expertise. Although I wanted Lena to get her hands on the materials, I was loathe to impose on her to do so. And she seemed to develop and learn quite well in her own way. Only years later did I really understand and accept that this was Lena's learning style, to watch inconspicuously over the shoulders of others as they worked with their hands.

Through her early elementary years, Lena produced little but learned rapidly and understood well. Lena became a medical doctor, a graduate of an illustrious university.

Unusual Blueprints: Carson

We choreograph our lives in relation to our issues, first from one direction and then from another. We move at new angles and invent new steps, but our issues are always with us, familiar themes for the dance of our lives.

He looked like the son of Michelangelo's David - beautifully proportioned and elegantly formed, darkly olive-skinned with deep green eyes, his head typically tipped down and turned to the side like that work of art, hidden in thought. Carson feigned a studied and uncomfortable nonchalance and sudden, long, uneven sighs. He was very quiet. He sat at a table politely but firmly declining, with a tight grimace and a slight shake of the head, all invitations to join groups for lessons or activities.

Since direct attention seemed to make him so uncomfortable, I decided to address whichever child happened to be sitting beside him. To that child I made the introductions and presentations of activities I would

Support and Engagement for All Students

by John R. Snyder and Donna Bryant Goertz, Austin Montessori School (continued).



have made to Carson. I gathered several children together around him instead of inviting him to join us elsewhere. From the corners of his eyes he watched warily, glancing away quickly with practised casualness if we gave signs of including him.

I should have recognised that still point in time and space just before the pendulum rushes in blind abandon to its destiny on the other side. What seems to be a child's developmental paralysis is sometimes merely the adult's refusal to feel time as a child does - extravagantly, luxuriously, abundantly-to wallow about in it and enjoy its squishiness. We of little faith doubt and despair while the child expands and experiences--in his own time, in his own way. It is often our rush to label and treat that crystallises a process into a problem.

Carson watched the children at tables and on work mats around him and occasionally forgot to suppress the lively interest that danced just behind the curtain of his reticence. Once when a child left a material out on the table and joined a group on the floor, I saw Carson secretly moving the pieces about. When he saw me he flinched and returned to his practised remoteness. Soon afterward, I approached a child working with a material that had interested Carson. Setting down a new material before

him, I slid the old one over onto Carson's table, asking Antonio as I did so if he would allow me to be very pushy and interrupt his work with a new lesson.

'I guess so,' he answered, both surprised and curious at my unusual behaviour. 'Here, Carson, take care of this for us while I give Antonio a new lesson. Oops! Now look what I've done. I've messed up Antonio's work. Will you straighten it back up while I give him this new lesson?'

I had made sure to mess up the work enough to require a complete reworking. When I had finished the presentation to Antonio, and Carson had redone the previous work, I went on my way, leaving events to unfold on their own. During the following days I repeated the scene with other children and other materials.

And so it came to pass that children would push their materials over to Carson instead of returning them to the shelf in the customary manner. Weeks later, in his own way and in his own time, Carson began to get up and go about the classroom, tentatively initiating activities and cautiously joining groups. I had addressed the issue indirectly in a way that had spared him the attention with which he was not yet comfortable. To avoid the pressure of a presentation, I continued to give the new lessons intended for Carson to a child sitting beside him or to a group assembled close by. Gradually he recognised that this was my intention and drew closer, trusting the evidence that I would take care not to crowd or rush him. Gradually, I began to glance at him and finally to address him directly. Indirection can be a fine key to leave lying about for a child to notice on his own. At last I began to leave openings for Carson to speak as well.

When any child made a statement about Carson, describing him as shy or not speaking or staying at one table all morning, I responded with light and cheerful information, 'Oh, yes, he has his own way', or 'Carson is wise enough to take his own time, the time he needs', or 'Carson knows what's right for him,' or 'He likes to think a long time before he speaks'. Since the children are accustomed to my refusal to label or to accept labels

for them, they almost intuitively join me in magnanimous and expansive acceptance, creating unprecedented new ways of accommodating individuality.

More excerpts from Support and Engagement for All Students will be published in Informed in 2009.

Published with kind permission of John Snyder and Donna Bryant-Goertz.



John R. Snyder leads a nine-twelve class at Austin Montessori School in Texas, USA. Before becoming a Montessori guide he spent twenty years as a computer scientist and technical management consultant. He holds degrees in music theory, computer science and philosophy as well as an AML (6-12) diploma from Washington Montessori Institute. Kay Baker was one of his trainers.



Donna Bryant Goertz will be a keynote speaker at the Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand conference in 2010. Donna founded Austin Montessori School in Austin, Texas, in 1967. She directed the school and taught there for thirty-four years. While continuing to direct the school, Donna is now head of parent education, staff development, and new programmes initiation. Educators, professors, and students from all over the world have studied Austin Montessori School's continuum of service to families of children from 14 months through 15 years to learn more about the philosophy of Montessori education and the particular school culture. Donna has received her Montessori Elementary diploma from the Fondazione Centro Internazionale Studi Montessoriani in Bergamo, Italy, and her Assistants to Infancy diploma from The Montessori Institute of Denver, Colorado. She is a founding member of Educateurs sans Frontiers, a select group of 26 Montessorians from 16 countries dedicated to applying Montessori principles beyond the school walls. She has been published in several well known educational journals and has spoken at conferences throughout both North America and the rest of the world. Donna and her husband, Don, are the parents of 7 children and grandparents of 15.

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Association Montessori Internationale - New Executive Director

Lynne Lawrence



The Association Montessori Internationale was founded in 1929 at the first international Montessori Congress in Helsingor, Denmark. Dr. Montessori was aware of the need for co-ordinating the spread of her ideas and to safeguard her original contribution on behalf of the child and she decided to create the Association Montessori Internationale.

The head office of the Association Montessori Internationale is located in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The building, which houses the AMI Secretariat, was acquired for Dr. Maria Montessori and Mario Montessori before their return from India in 1948. They lived and worked there until their respective deaths in 1952 and 1982.

A new executive director for Association Montessori Internationale was appointed in August 2008 as part of the new strategic direction for the organisation.

For Lynne Lawrence, a stalwart of the Association Montessori International community for more than three

decades, it's a whole new world. And she's assumed a lot of responsibility in it.

This spring, she became the first executive director of Association Montessori International.

The acclaimed author of *Montessori Read and Write* has, for the past 18 years, led the Maria Montessori Training Organisation (now the Maria Montessori Institute) in London. More recently she served on AMI's ad hoc strategic planning committee and chaired its Human Resources Committee, taken a seat on the AMI board, chaired its Human Resources Committee and assumed duties of interim general secretary after Mary Hayes died in May 2007. Her official appointment as executive director came this spring.

She brings an ambitious vision, honed in the strategic plan discussions that proposed changing the general secretary position to executive director as part of positioning the organisation to be more aggressive internationally.

'In the next few years we want to reawaken Montessori's social mission, her social message-that Montessori is for everyone,' Lawrence said. 'We want to be advocating across the social spectrum in all parts of the world.'

'We have created the pedagogical support systems,' she said. 'Those are in place. That allows us to look beyond-at our original intent.'

'That social mission means we have to look at more outreach, responsiveness, more ways of empowering people to take action.'

She identified AMI-USA as a model. 'AMI-USA is very responsive,' she said. 'I look at East Dallas School, the work of Molly O'Shaughnessy (in developing a new institute in St. Paul). Those sorts of work are to be supported.'

She said she hopes to bring the voice of Montessori to a range of world forums. She point to the recent work of AMI board chair André Roberfroid in meeting with African

education ministers and accepting an invitation to serve on a the task force of their organisation.

She trips off a list of countries on her radar. There is Thailand, which is looking for a new understanding with AMI to providing training. Tanzania, where there are many schools but no AMI training. China where AMI's new training centre has begun work on a second cohort and has 300 future teachers on a waiting list. Australia and Bhutan seem poised for attention.

Her work in Kenya between 1978 and 1985 has influenced her vision. 'We want, as AMI, to be seen as making an impact with all children who deserve better.'

It inspires her to talk about 'a new platform for helping the underprivileged'. She sees the work of helping the poor around the world to help themselves.

'I saw,' she said, 'how, with the very little they have to work with-but with the right attitude and ability to make correct materials-how children's needs could be met more than adequately in a rural situation. That, for me, was for me a humbling experience. It focused my thinking on Montessori principles.'

She sees the potential to build on core standards while 'allowing bodies in different countries to apply the standards in ways appropriate for the locality.'

'We want to be more effective' she said. 'We have to develop the infrastructure to act more responsively, more quickly, to provide what is being asked of us by affiliates.'

'We want to be building an infrastructure of regional groups,' she said. 'We want to create a much more responsive connection with them, to provide them with services they can apply locally.'

Her vision includes expanding services in the traditions of *Educateurs sans Frontières*, the AMI programme that brought teachers into service projects around the world.

Association Montessori International - New Executive Director Lynne Lawrence (continued).



Above: Association Montessori International Head Office, Koninginneweg, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

She said she looks forward to using a variety of media to provide materials to non-traditional audiences, including parents, midwives and social workers.

'We are committed to creating teachers and teacher trainers to help people connect areas of need with people who can offer help.'

That means careful innovation in teacher education, such as a model being piloted for public school teachers

in Kansas City, and in the preparation of teacher trainers, such as a three-year seminar format to complement the traditional apprenticeship model.

She is also looking to expand on sentiments of collaboration that have come from AMI leaders in recent years. 'We must respect that different people have their own plans, which certainly is important. But by all means, work with us in the movement. Be proud of what you have done for the child. We will always be proud of what we offer.'

It's all a life change for Lawrence. 'I was very happy as director of training at the Maria Montessori Teacher Organisation. It was only in doing the job (on the interim basis) that I realized how much I loved it.'

It feels daunting but fun at the same time. This is a very good moment for Montessori. There is a lot of interest in it worldwide.

'What I enjoy is the global nature of the work, connecting to many Montessorians of great wisdom, seeing how AMI can move now toward a more humanitarian outreach, and peace initiatives, which are part of its wider vision.'

'We have a mission and we'd like people to join us-as a member in AMI or doing something to make a difference.. There is a new mood-and not just in the United States but across the world. People are genuinely interested in helping their children to be educated in a different way. That's our challenge.'

'This is a movement,' she said. 'We are hoping to provide leadership.'

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26th International Montessori Congress, Chennai, India, January 5-8, 2009

The Montessori community the world over gathers itself in an

international congress once in four years to look anew at the responsibility of educating children for a holistic life in a changing world.

The 25th International Montessori Congress under the auspices of AMI was held in Sydney, Australia in 2005 and over 60 New Zealanders attended this event.

Chennai will host the 26th International Montessori Congress at Kalakshetra, an organisation which was started by Rukmini Devi Arundale. This has historical significance, since Dr. Montessori first came to India, to Chennai, at the invitation of George and Rukmini Arundale.

The theme of the Congress is Sadhana, reflective practice, spontaneous living. Looking to both its universality and locality, Sadhana has been chosen as the theme for the Chennai Congress to establish the simplicity and profundity of the Montessori message.

Several New Zealanders are planning to attend the Congress in India and MANZ hopes to include their reflections in *Informed* in 2009.

Above: Dr and Mario Montessori, India, 1940

Close partnership between educators and the parents of families in their care is a key to success by Melanie Riwai-Couch.



As a pupil at St Albans Primary School in the early 1980s, I remember being at school early and sitting in anticipation under the oak tree at the entrance until the teachers said it was okay to go to our classrooms.

Playing marbles, break-dancing and road patrol were priorities. We sang the national anthem at the start of assembly, and even though I had never played cricket before, on the day that it was my turn to supervise the cricket gear on the back field, it became my favourite sport.

School will conjure up different memories for different people. When we become parents, our own memories and experiences have a significant influence on how we prepare our own children for learning.

Young children are naturally curious about the world around them. The desire to explore, to touch, and to ask endless questions are all motivated by their hunger to learn.

A colleague at the Christchurch College of Education recently likened learning to a journey: taking time, sometimes following many possible paths and occasional dead-ends, and best enjoyed in the company of good friends and family.

It begins at home. Parents and families are the first educators of children and retain pole position as the most significant educational influence throughout life. Reading to babies and toddlers is hugely beneficial for their later literacy development. Even before children can understand words and concepts they recognise voices and respond to the rhythm of words in stories. Parents and caregivers create learning opportunities by talking, playing and spending time with their children.

Ideally, early childhood education providers, schools and colleges should act in partnership with parents and families during a child's education. Some parents may have had negative experiences when they were at school. This can make it uncomfortable approaching teachers or the principal for help or advice about their child's learning. Some schools work hard at building positive

relationships with parents by having regular events and social activities. Teachers who maintain regular contact with parents with newsletters and phone calls are more likely to be considered as approachable than those who do not.

The modern curriculum allows for the consideration of diverse learning needs, interests and cultures. Children today learn about many things that previous generations never encountered. Children can be encouraged by parents asking questions about what they are learning, and by showing a genuine interest.

Approaches to learning have also changed, and perceptions that physical education is only about playing sport and blowing off steam are outdated. The current Health and Physical Education curriculum provides for the holistic development of learners and, in addition to physical activity, you are just as likely to see students developing understanding about their body, how it works

■ Close partnership between educators and the parents of families in their care is a key to success by Melanie Riwai-Couch (continued).

and moves, and how they relate to others. This shift provides increased emphasis on attitudes and values about the important role physical activity plays in our lives and recognises the importance of providing for the physical, mental, spiritual and social development of learners.

Schools will not always reflect the preferred values and beliefs of parents and families. Education is a complex process and needs to be navigated and reviewed regularly. Teachers appreciate constructive support that will help with the education of the children they teach. If you have concerns, contact your child's teacher. Attend parent-teacher interviews, maintain regular contact and build a relationship with the school.

One of the fabulous things about working at the College of Education is the vast array of people you get to teach and talk with. Not only are they passionate about learning and education, most are also parents and grandparents so have a vested interest in working towards positive learning experiences for children and young people. As doctoral students in the late Emeritus Professor Graham Nuthall's Project on Learning, Christchurch College of Education lecturers Sue Collins and Veronica O'Toole spent two years observing the ways nine to 11-year-old children took part in class activities set by their teacher, and their social interactions with the teacher and other children. They found that children are often more concerned about the presentation of their school work, such as the way they set it out, drawing attractive borders, and keeping it neat and tidy, rather than on what the teacher expected them to learn. We learn from this that increased emphasis needs to be placed on the actual learning outcomes, and these need to be clearly communicated to the learners.

As adults, parents and teachers we may like to consider giving more attention to what children and young people think about their learning and school experiences. Adults can benefit from consulting with and listening to children

about their learning experiences and preferences. Children's wisdom, knowledge and self-awareness of how they think, feel and learn tends to be under-valued. For example, a 10-year-old boy interviewed by O'Toole for the Project on Learning about his learning experiences explained, 'What I think is that some people _ they don't think that children know much about things ... so that sometimes they don't really bother asking you questions.' At the end of his interview, he said, 'Oh, well, thank you for giving me this opportunity to actually tell you what I know without, like, anyone interrupting me and telling me no, this is total nonsense.'

If your children are still young, consider establishing routines now that encourage good learning habits, curiosity and a love of learning. A regular reading time and homework space, discussions about what is happening at school and in the community, exposure to books and other cultures, planned and spontaneous family outings that have educational value, eating healthy food and limiting time spent watching television or playing computer games will all pay off in the long run.

Supporting teenagers at school can be a little bit like walking blindfolded through a minefield. Potentially, every encounter can be a step closer to freedom or fatal. As a secondary school teacher I have discovered that the most intelligent students aren't necessarily those who get the best grades. There are a lot of average students who work hard and get good results. There are also a lot of intelligent students who struggle. Social pressures, stigmas regarding achievement, boyfriend/ girlfriend issues, lack of structure at home to support learning and, increasingly, intense commitments that interfere with study, such as competitive sport and paid employment, can all have a negative impact on educational performance.

Students who are happy, feel emotionally supported, and have a good balance of hobbies and relaxation time are more likely to demonstrate the resilience to navigate the

challenges of secondary schooling and adolescence. Consider avoiding conflict immediately before school, but ensure issues are talked about in a timely manner.

It is important to talk with teenagers to help them think about their learning, what motivates them and what benefits or risk can come from different habits. Parents and families will always be the main support for ensuring that teenagers are well fed (limited sugar and fizzy drink before classes, please), well resourced and in an appropriate emotional state for learning.

While the oak tree at St Albans School might stand for another 100 years, the learning challenges and opportunities that will face the children sitting underneath it will evolve constantly.

The good news for parents and families is that there are many things that can be done to support children and young people with learning.

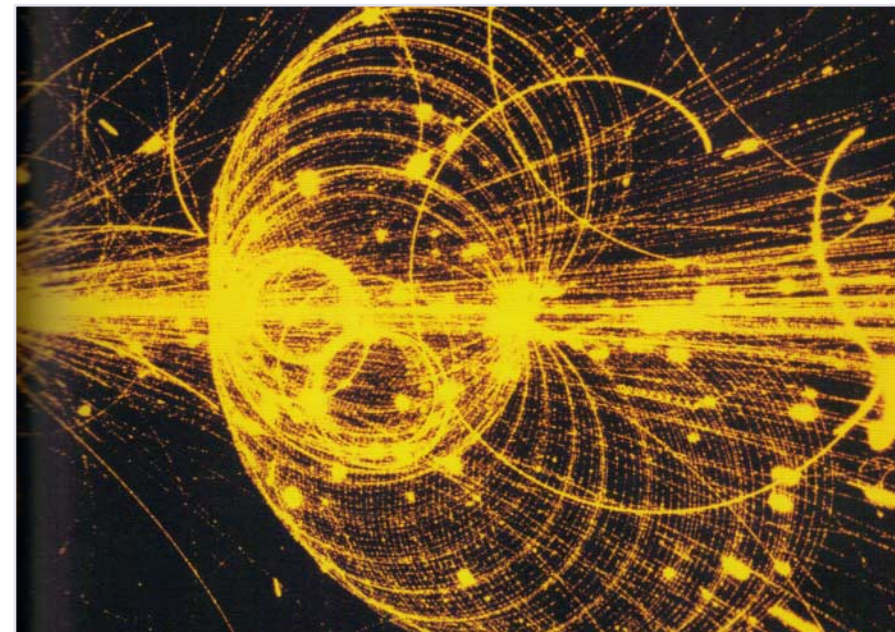
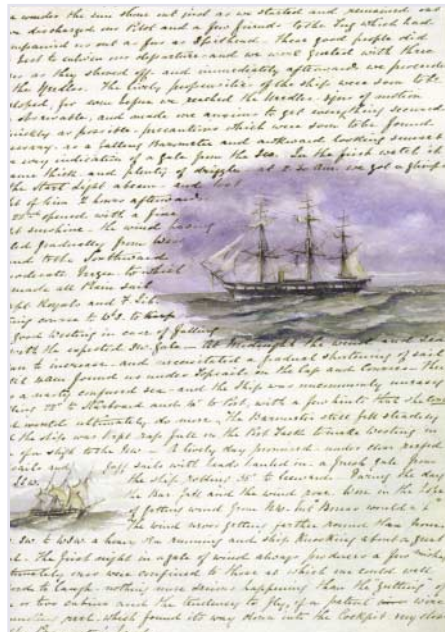
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Note: On 1 January 2007, the Christchurch College of Education merged with the University of Canterbury to become the University of Canterbury College of Education. The College also now incorporates the University's School of Education. Melanie Riwai-Couch is now contracted as a Senior Adviser for the Ministry of Education.

Before the Timeline of Humanity - Creating a Remarkable Learning Tool

by Lawrence V. Schaefer.



We were fortunate to have Larry (and Pat) Schaefer at the Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand 2008 Conference in Napier, NZ. Larry has been delighting many Montessori adults with the timeline of humanity...here in his own words he emphasises the importance of this 'story' for today's learners.

Since my training at Bergamo in 1970 and 1971, I have been struck by a missing historical timeline for the elementary Montessori programme. We lacked a really effective timeline of human history, a timeline of all civilizations.

There is a Timeline of Civilizations, and some Montessori elementary teachers use it. Eleanor Honnegger, one of the Bergamo trainers, showed this timeline to the training class in 1970-71, but she did not present it. This Timeline of Civilizations, however, is difficult to use and is ineffective in inspiring student work.

Missing also was someone to embrace the challenge Maria Montessori set forth in the 1930s and published in her 1948 Erdkinder essay, to present 'the history of humanity ... as completely as possible'. She believed adolescence was a sensitive time for the development of a person's humanity, and by humanity, she meant the study of how people created culture-the many hundreds of cultures.

But later, in the 1940s, when Montessori created Cosmic Education, it became clear that the presentation of the history of humans must begin in the elementary programme. Adolescents study history at a higher, more thoughtful and critical level, but to do so as well as we would like, they must have a basic knowledge learned in elementary classes.

To embrace the challenge of presenting 'the whole history of humanity' meant creating an effective and complete timeline of humanity - an awesome task. In the summer

of 2005 at NAMTA's Orientation to Adolescent Studies at Hiram College, OH, NAMTA Executive Director David Kahn asked me to take up this challenge and create a timeline of all human history. He said that the growing numbers of adolescent programmes and teachers needed the proper framework to present all of human history. An effective Montessori timeline would provide it.

This moment in July 2005 was one of those special moments when a great challenge met great preparation and great enthusiasm. I was electrified by David's request, and knew that this challenge was for me - a student of 'Big History', a PhD in Modern European and American history, a lover of timelines and an expert in Montessori timelines, an educator with many years of experience as an upper elementary teacher and 25 years with the Montessori adolescent.

■ Before the Timeline of Humanity - Creating a Remarkable Learning Tool

by Lawrence V. Schaefer (continued).

So began a two-year 'great work' in drawing, redrawing and then drawing a third time the Timeline of Humanity. I completed the project in the summer of 2007 and then published the timeline through the Lake Country Institute. Since then I have developed a guide to accompany the timeline and to assist teachers in using it.

As I wrote the timeline and guide, I traveled to Montessori elementary and adolescent programmes around the world, from Hawaii to Ohio to New Zealand, presenting the timeline to teachers and students. The only way to determine the true effectiveness of the timeline was for teachers to present it and to observe student reaction. I was delighted by what I observed.

Adults and children alike responded with awe and wonder. The timeline spans the last 40,000 years of human civilisation on earth and measures 18 feet in length, a physical manifestation of a very long, deep period of human time. It includes every major human culture.

I watched as students and teachers pored over the timeline. One high school student placed his hands over a fraction of the timeline. 'I've only ever learned about this,' he said. 'I've missed out on all the rest.' An elementary student asked what the key symbols stood for. When I told her they represent important or 'key' inventions and discoveries, she searched the entire timeline. 'I'm looking for the invention of art', she explained. 'I think that's a really important invention and I want to see if it's here.' This provoked a spirited discussion about how people decide what constitutes an important invention.

Red dragons on the timeline that depict challenging or negative forces from both within and from outside humankind sparked debate in an early adolescent programme. One of the dragons represents the many different human languages. Some students felt this diversity of language was a good thing, not a negative. Others argued that the many languages created barriers to communication and could have been a factor in the beginnings of wars.

Students also liked the loose images that come with the timeline - modes of transportation, influential people in human history, great wonders of the world and fallen or collapsed civilisations. Eagerly, they searched for the proper section of the timeline so that they could place the images in the right time period. They talked about other images that would be appropriate to create and to place on the timeline.

One aspect of the study of history I was hoping to spark in the students was the consideration of the Why, the What, the How. I wanted students to see the connections and to explore why and how those connections occurred. Because the timeline reads both horizontally and vertically, students can discover what was happening in civilisations around the world at any given time. They can trace evolutions and changes in civilisations, and they often turned to me or to their teacher with questions: "How come these people started farming before these people?" and "Why did this civilisation just end and why did it happen right then?"

When creating the Guide to the Timeline of Humanity, I included a number of 'sweep' stories - stories designed to reflect the whole compass of an age in history and to spark student interest in the details of that age. I found that students loved these stories and I encouraged them to come up with stories of their own, researching the details and putting together a story about a particular age and a particular culture that fascinated them.

Having watched students and adults work with the timeline, I realized that not only is it an effective timeline for teaching the whole history of humanity, but it serves a deeper purpose, one that points to the rationale behind Montessori's original challenge. The Timeline of Humanity inspires students to look into the human heart and mind and make judgments - distinguish the good from the bad, to celebrate the great achievements, acknowledge the mistakes and understand the consequences of human actions. They gain a deeper understanding of cultural,

ethnic and group identities and are able to better understand themselves and to appreciate others. While critical thinking skills are important and give students a real leg up as they go on their educational path, even more important is the fact that, by studying the whole history of humanity, they are able to envision peace. They look at the end of the timeline and question where the human race is headed. They see the accomplishments and struggles in human history and wonder what we can learn from history to help us create a peaceful world today.

The Timeline of Humanity comes with a detailed teacher's guide. It is available through the Lake Country Institute at (612) 436-9860 or snel...@lakecountryinstitute.com or www.lakecountryinstitute.com

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Don't Colour Inside the Lines

by Julia Volkman.



Many of us were taught in our Montessori teacher training courses how to use black-and-white outlines as guides for the children to colour in.

In my course, I remember spending hours colouring outline maps for all of the continents. In so many classrooms we find children colouring in outlines of animals to make 'parts of' books: animals within a biome, flags from different countries, even pumpkins for Halloween and turkeys for Thanksgiving. Seeing children colouring is such an ingrained part of our culture that I hadn't considered it deeply. But recently, I have-and I discovered something entirely unexpected.

We know that the child under age six is in an extraordinarily creative phase of development. This is a time of self-construction, when the child literally creates his or her own self. He lays his hands upon the world in a quest for self-mastery and then adapts his very personality to fit in with the results of his exertions. We know this to be true. We also know that many children under age six are unable to realise perfection in colouring in outlines...and we know that the young child knows what perfection is. As they see themselves err they receive a message that says, 'I cannot do this well. I am not a very good artist'.

I remember when I was a child my older sister was a talented colourer. All of her pencil strokes were made in the same direction and never seemed to stray beyond the black printed edges. Her colouring books looked so lovely. I distinctly remember 'discovering' that she was a skilled artist while I was not. I knew that my artwork didn't come close to hers. She is four years older than me. I wonder how my artistry may have developed on a different course if I was not given outlines to colour until I had the potential to realise my sister's level of perfection.

So what does this mean? Are we doing a disservice to the child by giving him outlines to colour in? That would be in direct opposition to the norm of our culture.



Is holding back outlines the right course or just an over-the-top opinion? How can we know which path to follow? The answer, of course, is within the child herself. We must remove our bias, our prejudice, our need for the outcome to be one way or the other, and look to the child.

Ginni Sackett, an AMI 3-6 trainer in Portland, OR, found that teacher-prepared outlines 'do not attract deep engagement or concentration, but do seem to invite "busy work" or the illusion of engagement while distracting children away from engagement with the more intellectual or challenging materials that would be more developmentally satisfying. They also seem to encourage or support "product based" rather than "process based" activity, and again distract children away from following intrinsic, developmental motivations. I think they are also a distraction to the teacher from his/her work of supporting

■ Don't Colour Inside the Lines

by Julia Volkman (continued).



development via all of the activities in the Casa. It is much more important to help three- to six-year-olds develop the confidence and skills for drawing...to experience that we are all artists (musicians, writers, etc.) - these are not the "talents" of the few, but the birthright of all humans.'

Susan Stephenson, a Montessori teacher trained birth-12, an internationally-renowned artist and founder of the Michael Olaf Company, said, 'As an artist I see the avoidance of free drawing perhaps as the same problem some adults have with the Montessori bells. They think that if they are not musicians or artists they cannot possibly teach music or art. One of my strongest memories on schools visited in London was of a nature table that contained a few pictures drawn by the children-birds drawn from book illustrations, in great detail of composition and colour. They were obviously the child's hand, and very lovely.' AMI elementary trainer Jean Miller relates prepared outlines to the saying, 'Every unnecessary help is a hindrance.' By removing prepared outlines we are potentially removing an obstacle from the child's path.

'If a drawing is instigated by the child,' notes AMI associate course trainer Irene Fafalios, 'the potential for creativity and real expression is limitless-we don't know what a child will do-whereas with a teacher-prepared outline,

there is really little else that a child can do other than colour it in.'

So choosing not to offer prepared outlines does not limit the child's ability or opportunity to express himself artistically. On the contrary; it frees him to do so.

Sacket notes that she 'would not interrupt or re-direct children who spontaneously (and with concentrated engagement) initiate this type of work on their own-for example, creating their own outlines or free-hand drawings. A guideline I give my students is that this would most likely happen spontaneously with older children - and there would be some limits... Observation would be key in distinguishing when this is activity in harmony with development, rather than activity thwarting development.'

Our task, then, is not to blindly follow a recommendation but instead to observe, test and adapt as necessary. We must engage the children in activities that free their potential for exploration and expression via the visual arts. We can offer presentations on painting on the easel, painting with watercolours, tracing and filling-in the metal insets, and tracing and cutting out puzzle-map pieces to create a mosaic.

Annette Haines, AMI 3-6 trainer in St. Louis and member of the AMI Pedagogical Committee, notes that children can create colourful designs with the metal insets and illustrate their story-writing with freehand drawings. They can decorate their math work with geometric designs along the border. They can also work freely with paints, clay, and pastel chalks.

Through all of this, we give children the non-judgmental message that they are able to create art that is of value.

When the children are satisfied with what they have created, they can feel within themselves the joy of their art. They become acquainted with the artist within each of us, even those of us who can't quite stay within the lines.

Being a Montessori guide is like being the dancer of an

unchoreographed dance. There are certain moves we know we will have in the dance, but we are not sure when they will appear, how often they will repeat, or how they will flow and fit together. We work without a script. We observe. We adjust. We step in to offer presentations. We step back to let things unfold without interference. We continually work outside the lines of traditional curriculum frameworks. This may be a small opportunity for us to extend that grace to the children, to help them stretch beyond the boundaries and discover that the boundaries weren't really there in the first place.

Postscript: Through my company, Maitri Learning, I have recommended and provided free support materials to encourage the use of prepared outlines in the Casa. Thanks to the guidance of my mentor and dear friend Susan Stephenson, I now believe that this was in error and am in the process of changing our offerings to align with this new understanding.

I am not asking any of you to blindly follow a recommendation. Instead, I am asking you to consider what is written here, to consider the wisdom of these teacher trainers, teachers, and artists and then to do as Montessori always guided: Observe your students. Look to see if these outlines are freeing them, as is always our intent, or limiting their potential.

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Julia Volkman is a primary Montessori teacher, the mother of a teenager and 3-year-old, the founder of Maitri Learning, the lead investigator on a clinical study of lamination methods in the casa, and the current chair of the Montessori Exhibitor's Association in the USA.