The AMC Montessori Centenary Newsletter

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Heidi Anne Spietz, Editor
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It's difficult to believe that the world is celebrating the centenary of Montessori education. For one hundred years, generations of children worldwide have had the opportunity to work with materials originally devised by Maria Montessori. Just imagine what the world would be like if, today, more children were exposed to Montessori style learning.

Twenty years ago, I began my odyssey into Montessori education. I read Maria Montessori's ***The Discovery of the Chid***, and I was hooked. Maria Montessori's insight into the mind of a child was and is nothing short of phenomenal. I have incorporated her methods and philosophy with countless

children in various learning settings and have witnessed the positive results. We, as a civilization, are forever indebted to a woman who has made such a profound positive impact on educating our children.

Please read my additional comments which follow at the end of this newsletter. Below, are thought provoking reflections contributed by members of the AMC Montessori Resource Center **http://www.amonco.org/directory.html**

Materials and Technology for Education (MTE Ltd.)

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Submitted by Dr. Mel Poage

I was very fortunate to have been one of the first Americans assigned to investigate the research of Montessori and Piaget. My investigation took me to London where I was privileged to work with the Nuffield Foundation and, in particular Edith Biggs who was Her Majesties Minister of Maths. Montessori and Piaget were doing research for a joint doctorate in epistemology and their research was discovering some interesting ideas concerning education and the teaching of children and young adults. Edith Biggs worked as a liaison between them and the outside world at the very first after they had completed their doctorate.

There were two ideas from the research of Montessori and Piaget that I have thought were the essence of their research:

1 Children learn actively; a child must be allowed to do an activity over and over again until they reassure themselves that what they have learned is true and this activity must be enjoyable.

2 Young adults must be able to read; they discovered in their research that the most singularly important element necessary for a student to understand a subject is that they know the language of that subject.

Visual Manna

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Submitted by Sharon Jeffus

I love the way that the Montessori method involves treating children as individuals and not just part of a group. I believe she truly encouraged that precious creative capacity in each child and allowed them to excel far more than a regular method of education could even imagine. She didn't want to squelch that original joy that a child has in learning. She encouraged freedom and independent thinking. Reading about her and her great dedication to children has profoundly affected my goals as an educator.

LORD Company

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Submitted by Richard Hundley

LORD Company was founded by Richard and Sharon Hundley at least a quarter a century ago. The beginning was "necessity being the Mother of invention". The support furniture for Montessori materials was so high that we just couldn't afford it for the first Montessori school in Elizabethtown, KY. This is when I discovered that I was more of a carpenter than I had ever realized. Over the years we discovered that many other schools were in the same position and began to offer the most economical alternative in the Montessori Furniture vendors. The best view of LORD Products is at http://www.lordequip.com

Priority Montsessori Materials Company

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Submitted by Ed and Ruth Pryor

Ruth Pryor first learned about Montessori Education in 1974. She already

had a love of children, having raised, at that time, four of her own. In that process she had become a volunteer religion teacher of the pre-Kindergarten age children for a number of years before and loved working with the "little ones". A neighbor opened a Montessori School in her garage and she and Ruth had many discussions about the teaching of the young.

A couple of years later in 1976, the neighbor decided to have a building built for the school and move out of her garage. Like almost all construction, the building was not ready at the start of the school year and the lady had to quickly lease some space for the school. The physical layout of the leased building did not allow the required teacher/student ratio required for the available staff so she asked Ruth if she would mind helping out as an aid for a couple of days or maybe a couple of weeks until she could hire another teacher or aid. That did it! She fell in love with the kids and the System. She was blessed by having an absolutely marvelous trained and experienced teacher to learn under, Carol Pendergast, a former AMS Board Member.

Subsequently, Ruth took her training at the NCME Training Center in San Diego and continued to teach. In 1983, her first grandchild arrived and was going to be in a "day care" situation. Ruth had long before vowed that if/when a grandchild was going to have to go to day-care, she would quit teaching to provide that care. And so she did, but she very much missed being associated with the Montessori children. While teaching, she served as Materials Chairperson on the Board of the San Diego Montessori Teachers Association. One of the young teachers who had interned under Ruth started her own school and asked Ruth if she would make some materials for her, "since she wasn't doing anything". That person's teachers saw the materials and said "me too". That resulted in her making a lot of materials for old friends during the time the infant was not at our house, charging them only for what the raw materials costs her.

The word got around and in 1986, the Training Center asked her to exhibit at the NCME Annual Conference. Ruth was at first reluctant. She did not think her materials were worthy to be sold. But she was finally convinced to do it and the rest is history. That year she got all of the Business licenses from State, County and City and the business has been growing ever since. She maintains that the things she makes and sells are the things she always wished she had had time to make while she was teaching. Apparently there are a lot of teachers with the same desires but lacking the time.

During the early years, Ruth and our children and eventually, children-in-

law, did all of the work. But the demand grew faster than the available labor. In 1993 we had to hire our first employee with a lot of fear and trepidation. The fears were unfounded. We kept bumping into people who enjoyed the work and got along marvelously. We have enjoyed that blessing ever since, even though we had to start over with that process in 1997. That year we had the opportunity to move back to the small town where Ruth was born and grew up and where her husband Ed's parents moved him as a 17 year old high school senior in 1952. We moved back to the farm property that Ed lived on as a teen. It was a bit of culture shock going from 30 years in the three million population San Diego to a town with 1550 folks and another 1400 on farms outside the town. But we relish it. The traffic in San Diego was driving us nuts. We didn't earn any positive points with a couple of our kids who got left there for reasons of employment. But they enjoy visiting up here.

Priority Montessori Materials continues to thrive in this thin air at 6000 feet elevation. We have to allow more lead time to get raw materials we need here on time and have to add an extra day to get to and from Conferences. We still go to about 6 to 8 a year. Ruth continues to add new items to our line, at least one or two a year. Many of her new products come from request by teachers we see at conferences. The still active teachers keep us on our toes. Ed sometimes gets frustrated with the spring conferences when he would rather be working the small farm. But that free time will come someday. The business keeps us busy enough that we don't have much time to get old.

So I can honestly say that Marie Montessori had a major impact on my life. I don't know if it is the impact she wanted but she certainly had her way of doing what she wanted. I certainly never imagined myself being a business proprietress during my growing up years in this small community, where the main social life was visiting neighbors and family on a Sunday afternoon. And high school was made up of various cliques and clubs and athletic events. Both my husband and I enjoy what we do and feel we are making a contribution to those dedicated Montessori teachers who are still in the trenches attempting to create an enlightened, confident, self-disciplined, clear thinking generation to follow after us.

Conceptual Learning

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Submitted by Dianne Knesek

To me, Montessori is the only program which enables every child to fully realize his potential.

Initially, my interest in Montessori was strictly personal. My husband's military and subsequent aerospace contract job assignments threw us into some "not so great" school districts. Several moms like me researched alternatives to traditional programs. Montessori philosophy kept coming up, and we were able to integrate "bits and pieces" into a local church preschool program. However, a complete Montessori program was not available, and we had to "settle" on a few practical life exercises and some "hands-on" learning materials produced by major toy manufacturers.

The premature birth of our third child prompted a new sense of urgency in finding the right educational program. He slept through most of his first year and developed at a much slower rate than his older brothers. He experienced both receptive and expressive language delays, punctuated by dyslexia. Fortunately, my husband's job had finally brought us to a suburb of Houston which had a Montessori school, and I put my toddler on the waiting list when he was less than two years old.

Duane was finally enrolled at the age of three and a half, and his younger sister joined him six months later. I became involved in the school, first as a substitute and an aide. I was so impressed I went on to earn certifications an a preschool teacher, lower elementary teacher, upper elementary teacher, curriculum coordinator, and teacher trainer.

Duane's deficiencies in language were addressed. Therapeutic exercises to correct his visual perception difficulties were integrated into his program, and he learned phonics, sight words, and reading -- all according to his learning style and his timetable. His bruised self-esteem began to heal. Had he been in a traditional program, he undoubtedly would have been relegated to "resource classes" where little would be expected, and subsequently little progress would have been realized. Moreover, he would have been labeled "special needs," and enrichment in any subject area would have been unexpected.

However, while Montessori addresses weaknesses, it's main attraction is that it builds on strengths. The struggling reading student observed older kids in math and science, and "took off" in these areas. He couldn't learn fast enough. By the time he was eight, he was writing computer programs. At eleven, he had completed a first year algebra program. After he "graduated" from Montessori school, his public school advanced him several years in the math and science curricula. He went on accomplish numerous milestones in math, science, and computer science in the highly competitive NASA area school district. He became part of the pilot program for two years of calculus in high school. In college, he had similar accomplishments. In a highly respected engineering university, he was asked to mentor other technical students. Moreover, he was on the "fast tract" in earning a Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering. He has been the "go to" person in his technical profession ever since.

Duane's story is gratifying. However, it is not that unusual. In my 25 years of Montessori classroom experience, I have seen the program attract numerous children that are obviously "gifted." However, the real story is that Montessori recognizes the giftedness inherent in all children. Among my graduates are normal and "at risk" kids who gained independence and self-esteem and went on to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, entrepreneurs, social workers, teachers, and wonderful parents.

To me, Montessori is about making a person the best he or she can be.

P.S.

As a curriculum coordinator, Dianne Knesek developed math enrichment materials that maximize the use of concrete Montessori math manipulatives and encourage critical thinking. The easy-to-use materials serve as an excellent bridge from the concrete to the abstract. Now retired from the classroom, Dianne makes these materials available through her company, Conceptual Learning Materials http://www.conceptuallearning.com

Creative Publishing

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Submitted by Kassandra, Melanie and Jennifer

We live in a time where people are desperately seeking meaning in their lives. One significant thing we can teach children is how to find meaning and exhilaration in activities that will nourish, rather than destroy them. Incorporating creative movement into a child's education will not "save the world," but it will help them become more aware of themselves, sensitive to others, and actively conscious of the world they share.

As Maria Montessori said, "One needs to be an insider, taking the perspectives of the child, and an outsider, being oa part of the child's environment and experience, constantly relating to the child in new ways and growing with the child." Young children need a variety of concrete, multi-sensory movement experiences to stimulate various types of development. They also need an abundance of fantasy and creative play to internalize and integrate such experiences. In our own work as mothers and teachers, we have found creative movement to be ideally suited to these purposes. Unfortunately, information about how to apply movement to child development has been scant. While the value of creative movement is gaining recognition, we hope that our work will encourage teachers and parents to consider adopting creative movement centers as an integral part of their existing curricula.

There are excellent – though mostly overlooked – learning opportunities for using movement with children between the ages of 2 and 12. During this brief time frame, true learning for a child occurs as PLAY in its highest form. Learning through play reinforces itself with the delight it brings. Children experience this delight when rich, playful language is united with the rhythmic exuberance of the body. Children discover that their minds and bodies contain a whole world of possibilities.

Kassandra, Melanie and Jennifer travel throughout the country training Montessori staff on how to set up and implement creative movement centers. (pictured below) In addition, schools will want to acquire "Kids on the Move! Creative Movement for Children of all Ages" -- curriculum designed to provide a positive learning experience for children. The program includes creative moving taught through rhyme, games, musical story telling, instrument playing, props, and development of basic concepts like rhythm, directionality, perception, and memory. Activities are presented in an imaginative and age-appropriate manner. Classes can easily follow the written outlines straight from the book with very little preparation, and specific music is not required. There are 45 lessons included in the book, which covers a full year of classes. For more information, visit http://www.creativekidsonthemove.com.

Borenson and Associates, Inc.

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Website: http://www.conceptuallearning.com

Submitted by Henry Borenson, Ed.D.

Maria Montessori spoke about "the spontaneous leap from the concrete to the abstract." We have noticed this concept in action as children use the Hands-On Equations program. At first they use the game pieces to understand the algebraic concepts. After a while they make their own discoveries, such as the concept that subtracting a quantity is the same as adding its opposite. They see the result in front of their eyes. We even saw a 4th grade student with learning disabilities do so. The appropriate concrete experiences can lead to this leap to the abstract. We believe Hands-On Equations lends itself very well to students making this leap to the abstract.

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Website: http://www.TeachingTank.com

Submitted by Dr. Paul Reinbold

In the 1980's, I was fortunate to have a position as Science Coordinator for 5 Elementary Schools with 85 teachers and 100's of children. On some evenings, my role changed to an adjunct professor in Education where the philosophy of Maria Montessori became part of every course. We as "teachers of teachers" understand the importance of manipulatives to get the children very excited about learning, especially in science. It was during my tenure at this job, that the TEACHING TANK® was invented to capture children's natural curiosity, to stimulate the critical thinking process, and to help children understand their surroundings with this award winning teaching and learning aid.

Maria Montessori's philosophy can be easily seen in our Teaching Tank Discovery Book series. As Maria Montessori left us her research, teachings, and methods, it is our intention that the Teaching Tank becomes a lasting legacy for all children for generations to come. Thank you Maria for your inspiration, you are the skeletal structure of hands-on / minds-on elementary children's search for understanding.

Professor Toto

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Submitted by Francois Thibaut

Maria Montessori's famous statement "I studied my students, and they taught me how to teach them" is the genesis of the method I developed for ***The Language Workshop for Children***.

My early career was spent teaching high school and college students French with a traditional, translation-based auditory template method. But when I began teaching very young children and tried that technique, the kids looked as though premature rigor mortis had set it. That's when I learned that you need to jump into a classroom grinning and keep them playing and laughing if you want to keep their minds open to the new words and meanings that are surrounding them

The Spiritual Nanny®

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Submitted by Barbara Ann Simone

I have worked with children for 30 years, specifically in their Spiritual Development. The vision of a child's Spirit brought forth from Maria Montessori,

has greatly inspired me! Maria Montessori was a deeply religious person. She believed in the education of a child's Spirit: "To discover the laws of a child's development would be the same thing as to discover the Spirit and Wisdom of God operating in the child."

Her belief that children are of the Divine, has inspired me in creating Spiritual Parenting classes: "They (the parents) will no longer consider the child as something begotten by themselves alone and, as such, their property to do with as they please. They will rather be vividly conscious, instead, that the child belongs to God rather than to them, existing for God rather than for them, and that they have received from God's own hand, this development and helpless infant in order that they, as God's helpers, may rear this new child of God according to the divine plan."
THANK YOU MOST BELOVED MARIA MONTESSORI for taking such a bold stand for the Spirit of each child! I am grateful!

LearningSuccess™ Institute

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Website: http://www.learningsuccesscoach.com

Submitted by Victoria Kindle Hodson and Mariaemma Pelullo-Willis

Since reading The Absorbent Mind in the late 1960's, Maria Montessori's ideas and quality of heart have been an inspiration and motivating force to find inner and outer resources for helping parents and teachers interact with children in the most respectful ways possible.

Every aspect of our work is based on this foundation of respect for the

child's stage of development and unique learning needs. In the Montessori tradition, we start where the child is and move at the child's pace. Rather than working from the "outside-in," we trust that the child's inner barometer for selecting what interests him or her will allow the child to blossom into understanding of the world and his or her place in it from the "inside-out".

The Learning Style Profile that we developed, our book, "Discover Your Child's Learning Style," and our workshops for parents and teachers continue to emphasize this "inside-out" education. Montessori's philosophy and methods are woven throughout our training programs.

We are grateful to Maria Montessori for giving the world such a solid foundation to draw upon for the education of our children.

The Creative Process

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Website: http://www.creativeprocess.net/gp/mont.html

Submitted by Rae Peterson

I believe the first time I heard the name Maria Montessori was in one of my education courses in college in the late 1960s. It wasn't until I had a child, and the lucky chance that a coworker was president of a parent based Children's House, that I looked into the Montessori program.

I was absolutely fascinated and comfortable with the approach of the Montessori method. I had attended a one room country school K-6, and taught art in public schools, so the environment felt like home to me. I cherish the memory of my toddler daughter exploring the room while we interviewed with the directress. It was clear Jessica was ready, and I am eternally grateful, that Montessori was there for her. As a young adult she has a love of learning and initiative that I attribute to the Montessori program and teachers.

Several years later I became acquainted with the publisher of a portrait poster of Albert Einstein with the quote "Imagination is more important than knowledge." - and one of my first comments was "You should do a portrait of Maria Montessori!" While it took a few years to accomplish, we finally did it.

We are very pleased to help spread the word about Maria Montessori and celebrate the wonderful work of Montessori around the world. The quote we chose to go with the Montessori portrait, "Within the child lies the fate of the future," is more poignant today than when Montessori wrote the words.

Cooking With Children Can Be Easy

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Website: http://members.aol.com/amcpr2000/cooking.html

Submitted by Kathy O'Reilly

Dr. Maria Montessori's philosophy was just what I was looking for back in 1974 when I knew I wanted to work with children, but not in traditional education. I knew there had to be a much better way. It was so exciting to find such a wonderful way for children to learn!

The Montessori philosophy quickly becomes not just a way to help children learn, but a way to live your life. Showing respect for everything, caring for others, slowing down your pace, being observant of fine details in all aspects of your environment, finding joy in cleaning and keeping things beautiful, letting your curiosity take you to new places and ideas, and enjoying nature are all qualities that enhance your daily life. It has made me a better person.

Cooking is my hobby, so I naturally wanted to share it with the children.

The delight on their faces as they eat something they have made is so rewarding. I discovered single portion recipes a couple of years after I started working at a Montessori school and kept notes of what I needed every time I presented a recipe.

Other teachers were interested in cooking, but just did not want to spend the time figuring everything out (quantities,shopping lists, equipment, related activities and drawing cards) so I took my 15 years of notes and created "Cooking With Children Can Be Easy - The Complete System for Single Portion Recipes" for teachers to use, cutting preparation time by 75%. Dr. Montessori wrote about the children preparing and serving lunch, but with so many state regulations, it isn't really possible. These recipes are the next best thing since EACH child gets to perform EVERY step of the recipe. Visit **http://members.aol.com/amcpr2000/cooking.html** for details.

Editor's Note:

I hope that you feel as heartened as I felt when I initially read each of the above contributions. I have tried to be true to Maria's methodology, and it continues to be my hope that my books **http://www.amonco.org/bookstore.html** and the American Montessori Consulting website established in 1996 **http://www.amonco.org** reflect this.

I will close with the comments that appear on the last page of my **Modern Montessori at Home: A Creative Teaching Guide for Parents of Children Six through Nine Years of Age** book (Original Edition 1989) NEW Edition 2007!

"Maria Montessori's mission for the child has been appreciated by educators, teachers and parents from every corner of the world. She used her innate gift of creativity and wisdom to devise lessons which would stimulate the child's interest in the world around him. She was wise enough to know that there had to be a better way for society to reach out to its children.

The child as a 'teacher' takes from the prepared environment what he needs to make the discoveries and spontaneous explosions involved with learning. However, we as educators, teachers and parents can assist the child by serving as his 'guide'. By presenting the child with the tools he needs to fulfill his potential, we accomplish two goals. First, the child climbs the ladder to becoming a self-actualized human being. Finally, as a society, we see the emergence of a caring, intelligent human being who will make a positive impact upon the environment. This was Maria Montessori's hope, and it should be our hope as well." Copyright 1989-2007. Heidi Anne Spietz. American Montessori Consulting. All Rights Reserved.

For additional Montessori information, please read the Montessori 101 eBook and download the seasonal hands-on lesson newsletters by visiting
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