

My name is Karen Tyler and I am the founder and instructor for the KHT Montessori certificate course. We are getting reading to launch the next group of students with the class that begins on September 21st! I would love to have any of you join us in this professional and affordable and... easy to take course. 50% of our students are parents working with their children at home from all over the world.

The “freebie” this time around is sharing two chapters from a book that talks about living with “The Montessori Method.” Shannon Helfrich walks us through how children grow and how Montessori facilitates in the development of the child. Many of you have probably wondered about “What Montessori looks like at home and in the classroom.” This book is going to help give you a very clear picture. You don’t need to borrow or purchase this book. If you want to add it to your personal library or you would like to borrow it, here are the details:

Montessori Learning in 21st Century – a Guide for Parents & Teachers
M. Shannon Helfrich
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ISBN 978-0-939165-60-5

Below are the actual posts from the classroom forum:

Chapter 2 – part 1 – The Relevance of Montessori in Modern Times

You may follow along and ask questions and make comments. I will be sharing what the authors’ have brought to our attention through their research along with my personal “linking” to the “Montessori Method.” Here are my beginning thoughts on the second chapter titled, **The Relevance of Montessori in Modern Times**:

I feel that this book is worth reading for parents and teachers because it covers the connection between when Maria Montessori developed her "Method" and today's scientific discoveries on how children grow and learn. This makes it relevant and very important for those of us that are carrying the "torch" into the future.

Dr. Montessori's studied children over 100 years ago. That was a long time ago and since then there have been hundreds upon hundreds of scientific discoveries on educating children. So, is the Montessori Method still working with children of today? The answer is “Yes!” I was very excited to find that our author, M. Shannon Helfrich, believes as I do that the scientific data does indeed support what Dr. Montessori discovered over 100 years ago.

Maria Montessori observed children and collected data, but she did not have the technology that our scientists and doctors have today. **All she had were her powerful techniques of observation and cadavers.** She studied the brains from cadavers and she studied the behavior of children to become acquainted with how a child learns.

First, Dr. Montessori studied the brain at the Orthophrenic School in Rome. She took all types of measurements of children's heads as they grew. Early studies in this field by others held the idea that race and possibly culture influenced the size of a human brain. Dr. Montessori wanted to explore the idea that good health and living conditions were a greater factor than genetics or cultural experience.

In today's world we have been able to study the brain in many ways and the results support the findings and studies of Dr. Montessori. She finished her study of the cadavers' brains and moved to focus on observing the children as they went about their everyday lives. She interpreted her data into what she felt was going on 'inside' the child's brain. **The result is what we refer to today as The Montessori Method.**

The author talks about one common criticism that is made about Dr. Montessori's research. It has been said that she did not clinically document her theories about the nature of a child's mind. I find this an unfair criticism because during the time in which Dr. Montessori lived, she did not have the modern "tools" that we have today. She was not able to really "prove" her theories were correct. However, if you look at her book **The Pedagogical Anthropology** you will find her writing extensive about her studies on the brain.... specifically the nature of the developing brain of a child.

Today, modern neuroscience has many tech tools that have been used to study the brain and its development. The exciting conclusion is that Dr. Montessori had it "exactly" right!

In 1996 there was a huge convention of prominent educators and neuroscientists that met in Chicago to correlate all the current brain research. Rima Shore, an educational researcher and writer, took all this data and summarized them in her book called **Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Development**, published in 1997.

Shore said that as recently as in the 1970s people still believed that the structure of the brain was genetically set at birth. However, after the convention and the information presented, there was a dramatic shift for science to view the brain development in young children as they acknowledged the influences of early childhood development and the child's role in their brain development.

Here is a quote from about a concluding statement from an eminent panel of scientists and educators who wrote after Shore's book:

“Indeed, brain research is one of the most exciting and fruitful scientific endeavors of the last decades of the 20th century. But unless this research finds its way into our homes and health clinics, our early childhood centers and classrooms, America's schools and human service institutions will remain locked in a 10th century paradigm.”

Now, I understand that this is speaking about the United States, but the research is about "all" children living "everywhere."

Moment to Pause and Think! Were you surprised that Dr. Montessori's "Method" was "right" over 100 years ago? Were you surprised that in the 1970's it was popular belief that the brain was genetically set at birth?

The neuroscientists and educators looked at the current research and they arrived at five significant conclusions regarding early childhood learning. Next, we are going to examine these five conclusions in light of Dr. Montessori's writings.

Blessings,
Karen

Good Morning!

We will continue our discussion on **The Relevance of Montessori in Modern Times** as I bring to light a few passages from Chapter 2 of the book *Montessori Learning in 21st Century – A Guide for Parents & Teachers* by M. Shannon Helfrich:

Chapter 2 – part 2 – The Relevance of Montessori in Modern Times

Today, we are going to begin to find out what neuroscientists and educators looked at in their current research that brought them to **five significant conclusions regarding early childhood learning.**

Conclusion One: "How a brain develops hinges on a complex interplay between the genes you are born with and the experiences you have."

Dr. Shore, in her book *Rethinking the Brain*, said that the information that was collected supported the fact that the brain is affected by outside conditions such as the food you eat, the care you are given, what kind of stimulations you receive. She said the impact of the environment is "dramatic and specific." This means that it is not just a general influence but a specific and direct influence which helps to "wire" our brains.

Maria Montessori wrote a book called *Spontaneous Activity in Education*. What she wrote about the brain correlates to what Dr. Shore found out to be true. In her book, Dr. Montessori said, "*Intelligence...is the sum of those reflex and associative or reproductive activities which enable the mind to construct itself, putting it into relation with the environment.*"

Maria Montessori wrote a book called *The Absorbent Mind* and she wrote, "*The child has an intelligence which is not conscious though it often seems to be endowed with reason. It begins with knowledge of his surroundings. This is an intense and specialized sensitiveness in consequence of which the things about him awaken so*

much interest and so much enthusiasm that they become incorporated into his very existence. The child absorbs these impressions not with his mind but with his life itself."

So, Dr. Montessori believed through her observations of children, that a child's needs cannot be met by "hereditary" alone. A child must be guided by other influences that enable a child to become a unique individual.

Conclusion Two: "Early experiences have a decisive impact on the architecture of the brain, and on the nature and extend of adult capacities."

Dr. Shore noted that by the age of three years, a child's brain has built 100 trillion synapses. The brain has to make order with all of these bits and pieces. The brain does this by linking cells which are stimulated by certain events happening over and over again or by other stimulus over and over again. So the more times a specific event occurs or a child is stimulated in a specific way, the more connections are made in the brain.

Dr. Montessori, in her book, *The Formation of Man*: wrote about how important it is for a child to be exposed to the environment and how important building a relationship to the environment is in order for a child's brain as it grows and makes the connections that it needs to make.

In her book she wrote, *"If the child from birth onwards, has to create his personality at the expense of his environment, he must be brought into contact with the world...he ought to take part in it...to be in touch with the life of adults. If he is to adapt himself to the environment, he ought to take part in the public life and to be a witness to the customs which characterize his race."*

Later Dr. Montessori wrote, *"The child absorbs knowledge directly into his psychic life...a kind of mental chemistry goes on within him...the child undergoes a transformation. Impressions do not merely enter his mind: they form it...the child created his own 'mental muscles,' using for this what he finds in the world around him."*

It has been proven by neuroscientists that children learn in the context of important relationships. Children that have warm, consistent care so that they make secure attachments in the formative years are more likely to develop strong social skills.

Conclusion Three: "Early interactions don't just create a context; they directly affect the way the brain is 'wired.'"

Dr. Shore reported what the neuroscientists said, *"The brain's intricate circuitry is not formed at a steady pace; rather, it proceeds in waves, with different parts of the brain becoming active 'construction sites' at different times and with different degrees of intensity."*

These "specific" times are sometimes called prime times, critical periods, and windows of opportunity...or as Maria Montessori called them "Sensitive Periods."

Dr. Montessori spent her life trying to change what people thought about the way children learn. Dr. Montessori believed that a child seemed to learn certain skills and abilities spontaneously during certain periods of development. After these "periods" pass it requires a much greater conscious effort for a child to learn the "said" skills.

Dr. Montessori's book, *The Secret of Childhood*, is a wonderful book to read. She wrote, "*Children pass through definite periods in which they reveal psychic aptitudes and possibilities which afterward disappear. That is why, at particular epochs of their life, they reveal an intense and extraordinary interest in certain objects and exercises, which one might look for in vain at a later age.*"

Moment to Pause and Think! It is so important that children build relationships to others and to their environment in positive and wholesome ways all through their childhood. As you look back over what we have been talking about, please consider the ways in which you can change or enhance the ways in which you assist the child as they go through their "Sensitive Periods."

We will finish up with Conclusion 4 & 5 in the next post.

Blessings,
Karen

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We will finish our discussion on **The Relevance of Montessori in Modern Times** as I bring to light a few passages from Chapter 2 of the book *Montessori Learning in 21st Century – A Guide for Parents & Teachers* by M. Shannon Helfrich:

Chapter 2 – part 3 – The Relevance of Montessori in Modern Times

Today, we will finish finding out what neuroscientists and educators looked at in their current research that brought them to **five significant conclusions regarding early childhood learning.**

Conclusion Four: "Brain development is non-linear: there are prime times for acquiring different kinds of knowledge and skills."

Dr. Shore wrote in *Rethinking the Brain* that, "*Scientists have learned that different regions of the cortex increase in size when they are exposed to stimulating conditions*

and that the longer the exposure, the more they grow. While learning continues throughout the life cycle, there are prime times for optimal development - periods during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific types of learning. These periods are described as 'critical periods' or 'plastic periods.'"

Neuroscientists aid that the development depends on the exposure of the brain to many kinds of stimulation according to a predictable timetable.

Dr. Montessori believed in these "sensitive periods." In her book the *Secret of Childhood* she said, *"When some of these psychic passions die away, other flames are kindled and so infancy passes from conquest to conquest; in a continuous vital vibrancy, which we have called its joy and simplicity. It is through this lovely flame that burns without consuming that the work of creating the mental world of man takes place."*

Conclusion Five: "By the time children reach age three, their brains are twice as active as those of adults. Activity levels drop during adolescence."

Dr. Shore said that the neuroscientist's final conclusion was that the first three years of life seem to set the foundation for all the development that follows.

Dr. Montessori wrote in *The Absorbent Mind*, *"Man possesses creative sensitivities instead of hereditary models of behavior, and if it is due to these that adaptation occurs to his surroundings, then it is clear that the whole psychic life of the individual stands upon a foundation which must be laid down by them in the earliest years."*

It was noted by Dr. Shore that some people may feel that they "missed" the right time or that it is impossible to do this for all children under 3 years of age. However, she says that recent research says that age's three to six seems to be the optimal time where great improvements for children are made if they have the optimal stimulation during this time period.

Scientists say that children even up through age 12 are very adaptable. Also, children with sensory integration problems are helped greatly with this approach.

In conclusion we can say that **The Montessori Method** will continue to work the way it has if we continue to follow the child and set up their environment for success. We need to realize that Dr. Montessori's approach is based on the natural and spontaneous development of the child. This is why we are always saying, **"Follow the Child."** We need to allow the nature of the child to unfold...we need to make sure that we don't "force" the child to unfold before they are ready.

I agree with the author of this book who says, **"To bring the Montessori approach into the twenty-first century does not require that we change or invalidate the Montessori tradition. However, it does require that we look to current knowledge to better understand the nature of the child. This is no different from what Dr. Montessori did."**

She took the work of Drs. Itard and Seguin and integrated their findings with her own findings. By doing so, we continue the great tradition she modeled so wisely."

Moment to Pause and Think! We can share with others that neuroscientists have backed up the claims that our mentor, a great pioneer, laid down before us so many years ago. It all still "rings" true for today! Now, be sure to tell others about how the Montessori Method relates in today's modern world!

Blessings,
Karen

Good Morning!

We will begin our discussion on **Talk, Talk, Talk** as I bring to light a few passages from **Chapter 7** of the book *Montessori Learning in 21st Century – a Guide for Parents & Teachers* by M. Shannon Helfrich.

Chapter 7 – part 1 – Talk, Talk, Talk

Chapter 7 immediately grabs your attention with discussing **Dr. Montessori's belief that mastering language is one of greatest conquests in the life of a young child.** She believed that between birth and six years of age a child goes into a sensitive period for language. A child, during this time is able to take all the spoken words they hear and create language so that they can participate in communicating with others in the world. It is pointed out that a child can do this with one or more languages at the same time. It is so easy during this sensitive period.

Lise Eliot, Ph.D. is an Early Childhood Development expert and she wrote a book titled, **What's Going on in There?** Dr. Eliot knows that it is a powerful thing for children to master language. She said, *"Learning to talk is probably the greatest intellectual leap of an individual's life. It opens up a new universe of questions reasoning, social communication and opinions...that punch all other types of learning into warp speed and make a child finally seem like a full-fledged person."*

It is truly amazing that in 6 short years a young child can go through a complex process of mastering language! The evolution of language took thousands of years...and a young child can do it in 6 years or less! Amazing!

I always thought my knowledge on how newborns learned how to talk was pretty solid, but I really didn't have a complete picture of how a newborn starts to put all of this

together. To a parent it seems that it just "happens" but there really is a process in how this all comes together!

By the **end of the second trimester in the womb**, the left hemisphere of the brain has already developed and is specialized for language. So, at birth, a baby's brain is ready to hear and to discriminate the different sounds that they hear. I am sure that many of us that have been in a room with a newborn and have witnessed that they will automatically turn their head toward a sound such as a bell. Have you also seen that a baby will react both physically and emotionally with movements to the sound of their mother's voice? **It can be someone in which the baby "heard" while in the womb or someone's voice that has already become important to them.**

After a couple of months, a child starts to separate vocal sounds from other sounds in the environment. By **four months** a baby can already discern who is producing the vocal sound and they will turn their attention toward the mouth of the person who is doing the talking.

As soon as a baby can hold up their own head, they will start to watch the muscles around the person that is speaking. They watch the mouth, the lips and the position of the tongue.

The author wrote, *"It is as if the baby's brain is imprinting the position of the speaker's muscles as sounds are created."*

I found it interesting that in our discussion about language with our study in the book titled **Nutureshock** that this author supports what we learned about real life people and television. The author said that people often ask, *"Do children receive the same information if they are watching the mouth of a person speaking on the television? The answer is No! In fact, babies don't connect sounds from the television with the person on television as the source. This is a great reminder of how important it is for an infant to have real people around her who are speaking directly to her."*

Moment to Pause and Think! Parents and others often ask how they should talk to a baby. I love it when I find those that realize that the way to talk with a baby is to talk about the activity they are doing or what they are thinking. It is so important to just talk and talk and talk....babies love it...and in the process you are starting to build a relationship with the baby.

Next, we will talk about how a baby from 6 months to 6 years old develops the ability to "talk!"

Have a great day!

Blessings,
Karen

Good Morning!

We will finish our discussion on **Talk, Talk, Talk** as I bring to light a few passages from **Chapter 7** of the book *Montessori Learning in 21st Century – a Guide for Parents & Teachers* by M. Shannon Helfrich.

Chapter 7 – part 2 – Talk, Talk, Talk

Last time we talked about how a child starts to talk and communicate. Today, we are going to discover the progression a child goes through to accomplish this great developmental feat!

Sometime around **6 months** of age, a baby is able to start to exercise the muscles around their mouth and you will start to hear babbling.

Sometime around **6-8 months** that babbling will randomly create some **phonemes**. The author points out that Chinese babies make the "er" sound very easily. All babies make the rolling "r." Babies at this time start to discard sounds that don't show up very often. So what they hear most often begins to be what they start to say.

Now, this is the time that if you want your child to be able to speak more than one language you need to start speaking in both (all) languages. No, this will not confuse the child. Your baby needs to hear all these "words" and "sounds" so that they will be able to remember and be able to reproduce later.

Somewhere around **9 months** of age the babbling begins to carry **intonation**. A pattern or melody of pitch changes that we use in a sentence. For instance, if we talk to our child, they will babble back and then we talk and they babble back. They realize by our sentence structure and intonation that a response is needed from them. Your baby still can't make out the words in a sentence, but they are starting to reflect and understand that there is a meaning to each word.

I think it is so fun when you talk to your baby and they babble back and you talk again and it continues and then if you laugh they giggle! I am sure that many of you can reflect on experiences where you have had a conversation like this!

Soon, usually around **9 months**, a child puts **two phonemes together** and will say a "word" and we all feel that magic was involved because the child finally "got it." Parents often compete for whether their child will say "ma" or "pa" first. The interesting thing I learned from this author was that traditionally, the two phonemes that are the easiest to combine are "m" and "ah" and the next spontaneously syllable is "dah." **So, it is a natural thing for a child to label their parents first! Don't you love this?**

However, it is pointed out that beyond the excitement that the baby has made a "word"...it is so important to note that the child has been able to physically use their throat mouth and tongue to make a word with symbolic representations. The first word actually stands for someone or something! I will never let this moment go without a proper celebration!

Most **18 month olds** know about **fifty words**. After this, the child starts to expand their vocabulary quickly. Every day they will add several words.

Then, somewhere between **2 and 6 years** of age a child can learn a staggering **eight words a day**.

The author says, *“By two years old, a child has intuited the complete structure of language and he can speak understandably. Indeed, what a child accomplishes in twenty-four months replicates what it has taken humans as a species tens-of-thousands of years to accomplish.”*

Also, from **2 to 6 years** old a child's vocabulary expands from **a couple hundred words to thousands of words**. By the time a child is **6 years** of age they will know between **10 to 15 thousand words**.

Everything a child sees must be labeled. It is very important not to "baby talk" to your child because this is the time when a child is learning language as it is supposed to be spoken.

The author talks about Dr. Montessori and how she understood the need to provide a child with accurate information. The names for people, places and things are needed during this sensitive period. This is why Dr. Montessori encouraged setting up the environment in a way that will encourage language development.

Dr. Montessori developed the 3-Period Lesson in order to help children learn new vocabulary. She developed the "Sound Game" to help children hear all the phonemes of their language.

Montessori teachers are always giving vocabulary to a child. Teachers are always putting together sets of picture cards for the classification of things. This is why we are always making cards about everything. A young child at this sensitive period can learn very difficult names easily and they will have this knowledge imprinted early.

The author talks about when we observe and see a child during these early years that has limited language skills, they will strike out, often physically. They are frustrated and need the "words". **Patience is the key to working with a child that is speech delayed**. I have had 2 grandchildren that have not spoken until well after 2 years of age. I was not at all worried...but their parents were very upset that something was wrong that could not be fixed. Both of these children now are in lower elementary grades and are speaking all the

time! One of these sweet children even had a speech challenge where we needed to play certain games to help her conquer the challenge.

Moment to Pause and Think! I have always said, observe your children well, and be pro-active in getting help. You may think you should wait to see if they "outgrow it." Don't, and the reason is because it is so much easier to fix something when a child is in a sensitive period. The younger the child is the better in most cases.

I hope that some of you have learned something new and exciting about how a baby and young child learn to talk!

I hope you enjoyed what you have read and that you can take something from it to apply to raising up children in a joyful and peaceful environment.

Blessings,
Karen