

Book Study - Understanding the Montessori Approach: Early Years Education in Practice (Understanding the ...Approach) by Barbara Isaacs.

This is a Book Study straight from the KHT Montessori Classroom. I actually cover a handful of book reviews. You do not need to purchase the books in order to follow along.

- Chapter 3 – Organization of Montessori Schools
- Chapter 4 – Learning and Teaching
- Chapter 5 – The Favorable Environment
- Chapter 6 – The Benefits and Challenges of the Montessori Approach to Children’s Lives and Communities of Today.

Chapter 3 – part 1 – Organization of Montessori Schools

I am very excited to review 4 chapters in this wonderful book that was published in April of 2012. We are starting out with Chapter 3 – Organization of Montessori Schools. I have had many questions over the years about the differences between the Montessori teacher training schools and how a Montessori school is set up. I think that the information gleaned through Ms. Isaacs’ words in this book will help give you a better understanding.

Dr. Montessori believed that “every” adult person was responsible for helping to nurture children. She said, “This is education, understood as a help to life; an education from birth, which feeds a peaceful revolution and unites all in a common aim...Mothers, fathers, politicians; all must combine in their respect and help this delicate work of formation, which the little child carries on...under the tutelage of the inner guide.”

All Montessori schools are not the same. Most schools follow the underlying principles based on Dr. Montessori’s discoveries. How these principles are interpreted depends upon the children’s developmental needs and the culture’s regulatory requirements of the country in which they live. There are over **22,000 Montessori schools around the world that provide education for children between ages 2 and 6.** Dr. Montessori did not patent or protect the name as a trademark and therefore the movement is unregulated. Therefore, a **wide range of practice** is observed. This means that you will find some settings in which the Montessori name is used to attract parents while not delivering the trained teachers or using any Montessori materials.

So, the code of practice used in Montessori schools around the world is linked with the training organization where the current owners studied. You could say that the interpretation of Dr. Montessori’s writings is unique to each training school.

The main 3 teacher training schools are:

1. **The American Montessori Society (AMS)**, training center which influences and directs training in the United States.
2. **The Association Montessori International (AMI)**, headquarters in Amsterdam. It defines itself as the protector of the Montessori legacy and offers courses internationally.
3. **Montessori St. Nicholas**, which was established in 1946 in London. It was the first organization to promote Montessori training by correspondence. Since 1998, the **Montessori Centre International** is the awarding body by the Montessori Board of Examiners.

All three of these training schools try to ensure that the training and qualifications are accepted all over the world. But...because there is not one single body to represent Montessori theory and practice...it is still up to each individual school as to how they interpret the Montessori Method.

Ms. Isaacs talks about the importance for the different schools to engage in conversations in order to try and find common ground.

Below are examples of how Montessori education is set up differently throughout the world:

1. The Netherlands fund Montessori primary education.
2. In the United States there are Montessori public schools which are financed by individual states.
3. European countries such as Sweden, Germany and Austria provide funding for schools which wish to follow the Montessori curriculum.
4. The Tibetan government's schools operating in North India all use Montessori materials. In these schools they have to also meet the local regulatory and educational requirements.
5. In the United Kingdom there have been opportunities for Montessori education to be delivered in mainstream schools in England.

Moment to Pause and Think! Take some time this week do some research online to see how Montessori education is set up where you are currently living.

Chapter 3 – part 2 – Organization of Montessori Schools

Last time we talked about the different “branches” of Montessori throughout the world. Today, we are going to continue our discussion about how Montessori schools are set-up!

Montessori Schools are usually divided into 3-year age spans:

1. Birth to 3 years of ages – referred to as the **Infant Community**
2. 3 to 6 years of age – called **nursery school**/kindergarten/Casa (Dr. Montessori's term)/etc.
3. 6 to 9 years of age – **primary** (lower elementary)
4. 9 to 12 years of age – **primary** (upper elementary)
5. Teens – **secondary** (Erkinder Dr. Montessori's term)

Infant Communities are usually set up for working parents and offer full day care. Children stay the whole day. Some Infant Communities have what they call a Mother/Other Care Provider and Toddler groups which are for 18-30 month old children. These programs give children the opportunity to become familiar with Montessori while in the care of either their primary or secondary care provider. These are usually one or two sessions each week that don't run longer than two hours at a time.

Babies are given the appropriate care (physical and emotional). Each child's individual developmental needs are met while following their sensitive periods. Sleeping, eating and changing centers around the child's time clock and not on a pre-determined schedule by the school.

Toddlers need a lot of carpeted floor space that is uncluttered. They are encouraged to feed themselves when they are ready. Potty training is accomplished in partnership with the parents. Gross and fine body movements are considered in both indoor and outdoor activities. All their learning activities are set out on open shelves and the child is free to choose what they would like to do.

The Toddler's day is often dominated by their meal times. They have indoor and outdoor activities after breakfast. Next, lunch and sleep time. In the afternoon and there are more activities available. The classroom shelves have some of the Montessori materials that are recommended for toddlers.

Nursery school or Pre-school as many of us know it, is set up for the child that is around 3-6 years of age. The child needs to be able to go to the potty, eat and dress themselves (for the most part). They need to be able to verbally express themselves (ask what they need, etc.). Most Montessori schools move children from their Infant/Toddler Community up when they are ready. These children blend in easily because they have already been part of a Montessori environment. If children come into the program at this age that have not had any Montessori education, it will take them awhile to learn the new routines, grace and courtesy, etc.

Ms. Isaccs says, **“The Montessori environment provides children with opportunities to refine their senses by using the specifically designed Montessori materials and games. These activities help to establish the foundations of conceptual understanding by organizing and classifying experiences and exploration of the materials. As children grow in social awareness**

they establish their first friendships and learn the social conventions of their culture and with the help of their peers and adults, who serve as positive role models.”

The 3 to 6 year olds day consists of 3 hour periods of time called work cycles. During this time they do indoor and outdoor activities, participate in small group lessons, story-time, music, yoga, etc. They might also receive a one-to-one lesson given by a teacher. The children can fix their own snack during any work cycle. Children that are at all day centers, usually have one 3 hour work cycle in the morning and one in the afternoon.

The environment is set up in a way that **promotes freedom of choice.** There are some children that jump right in and choose one activity after the other. Some children learn better by observing others that are engaged in an activity. They only touch the materials when they have absorbed everything they can about how to do it successfully. Ms. Isaccs says, **“The Montessori teacher will observe this child carefully; his/her body language will indicate engagement or ‘just passing of time’. Thus the teacher will either leave the child alone, or try to engage him/her in some activity which may be deemed appropriate, based on previous observations which identify the child’s interest or an area for development.”**

Primary – lower and upper elementary age children need an expanded learning environment. Specifically, Math and Language skills need to be practiced and integrated into the study of the Five Great Lessons. So, the children usually sit down and discuss daily or weekly work with their teacher. Many children then are put in control of a list of activities that need to be accomplished and they check them off when they have finished. The children now have specific tasks assigned for taking care of the classroom. They are expected to contribute and reflect on the moral and social aspects of life.

Moment to Pause and Think! **If you are working in a Montessori school, how are the ages divided up in the different classrooms. If you are working with children at home, are you providing an environment that meets the needs for each child?**

Chapter 3 – part 3 – Organization of Montessori Schools

Last time we talked about how Montessori schools are set-up according to different age groups! Today we will talk about the role of the Montessori teacher.

The role of the Montessori teacher was beautifully defined by Dr. Montessori as:

“She is the main connecting link between the material...and the child.”

“...the teacher teaches little and observes much, and above all, it is her function to direct the psychic activity of the children and their physiological development. For this reason I have changed the name of the teacher into that of directress.”

So, Dr. Montessori referred to a teacher as a “**director/directress.**” In recent years this word has been challenged and the title of “guide/facilitator” is more frequently used.

The Montessori guide is tasked to set up the environment so that it corresponds to the developmental needs of the ages of the group of children. Also, the environment needs to reflect the interests of the children that are in the class. She needs to be a keen “observer,” and make the necessary changes as the children grow.

In order to do the author feels that the guide needs to know six key things:

1. Children’s development, both the Montessori point of view as well as the perspective of developmental research (needs to stay current).
2. Needs to know how to use the Montessori Materials in her classroom as well as those materials which complement or enhance the child’s knowledge, understanding and skill set.
3. Needs to know how to observe and document children’s learning.
4. Needs to know how to place the child’s needs above their own.
5. Needs to set up the environment and keep it current according to the children’s abilities.
6. Needs to relate to colleagues and parents in an open and affirming way.

The author leaves us with this comment: **“Above all, teachers must trust the child in his/her ability to make the appropriate choices for their learning, whilst ensuring that the learning environment is diverse and provides for all the needs of the children in the classroom. In addition, teachers must be of a humble disposition so that they are able to learn from and with the child.”**

Barbara Isaacs’ 10 Key Points

1. Children’s learning in Montessori classrooms is organized in three-year age spans.
2. The organization of learning is guided by each individual’s developmental needs as reflected in their sensitive periods
3. Children’s days consist of three-hour spans, during which they are engaged in a wide variety of activities and have access to both the indoor and outdoor classroom.
4. Babies and toddlers are given as much freedom as possible to move and manipulate their environment as they develop their manipulative and language skills.
5. Children at the nursery age develop their autonomy and demonstrate growing initiative. The focus of their learning is on refinement of the senses and on introduction to literacy and numeracy whilst they grown in their knowledge and understanding of the world.
6. Primary school age children need a wider environment for their learning. They develop their mathematical and literacy skills, which are practiced and integrated into their study of the Five Great Lessons.

7. To deliver Montessori education across all of these age groups, the teachers need to be knowledgeable about the use of Montessori learning materials.
8. Montessori teachers must be able to give children the opportunity to lead their own learning they must be prepared to learn with and from children.
9. They must use observation as the key tool for the development of appropriate curricula.
10. The learning environment is an essential component of the Montessori approach; it changes as the children develop and mature.

Moment to Pause and Think! Take some time this week to think about your role in the setting you are currently in (classroom/home). What tasks are you doing well and why? Ask yourself if there are tasks, which you would like to be better at, and why. Finally, choose one task you would like to do or change and then commit to do the first thing to making it happen!

Chapter 4 – part 1 – Learning and Teaching

In this chapter we will be talking about **four main principles**:

1. Child initiated learning for mixed ages.
2. The teacher as main facilitator in a Montessori Learning Environment
3. Key assessment tool – Observation
4. Absence of formal testing in Montessori settings

The author starts with sharing these **quotes from Dr. Montessori**:

1. “The fundamental principle of...pedagogy must be the freedom of the pupil.”
2. “The instructions of a teacher consist merely of a hint, a touch – enough to give a start to the child.”
3. “There is only one basis for observation: the children must be free to express themselves and thus reveal those needs and attitudes which would otherwise remain hidden or repressed in an environment that did not permit them to act spontaneously. An observer...must have at his disposal children placed in such an environment that they can manifest their natural traits.”

Child initiated learning for mixed ages

Dr. Montessori placed the **child at the center of the education process**. She was a firm believer that children would unfold naturally. She also believed that we need to set up the environment so that the child’s learning is focused on their interests while the teacher is able to make sure that these interests encompass all that is needed to educate the child. Dr. Montessori believed that three main things are required of the teacher:

1. The teacher needs to understand children's development and the Montessori Method.
2. The teacher needs detailed information on the interests of each child and their learning style.
3. The teacher needs to be aware of and able to use a wide range of resources.

Dr. Montessori's teacher strategies are based on having the appropriate learning environment set up so that children are capable of teaching (**self-construction**).

The author, Barbara Isaacs, said this:

"She promoted education which guides children in preparing for adult life by becoming knowledgeable and understanding of their environment – socially aware individuals ready to defend human rights, the ecology of our planet and, above all, the need for universal peace."

The teacher as main facilitator in a Montessori Learning Environment

Dr. Montessori believed that the teacher's main purpose was to direct the child on their path. Teachers need to change any attitude that causes them to have an overbearing influence over a child.

Dr. Montessori talked about a teacher's need to prepare in a **"spiritual way."** Teachers need to spend time reflecting on empathy, personal humility and a genuine wish to serve the child.

Many English Montessori nurseries have started to use the concept of a **"Key Person."** The author says, **"Their role is to take special responsibility for a group of children, document each child's learning and act as a link between the family, nursery and child."** This person is the **"voice"** of the young child.

Dr. Montessori believed that the role of the teacher should be ever changing in the life of a child. The **"goal"** is for the children to eventually take over the management of their own learning.

Moment to Pause and Think! Take some time to think about how comfortable you are with **"following the child"**. At first glance, the role of a Montessori teacher/director/directress might seem to be a very passive. We need to remember that Montessori teachers are very significant because we are **"caretakers"** of the future!

Chapter 4 – part 2 – Learning and Teaching

The Key Principles of Montessori Classroom Management

The following key principles are mandatory for all Montessori settings:

Freedom

The author starts out talking about how some people have a misconception about what “Freedom” looks like in a Montessori classroom. There are those that think that freedom is the same as a “free-for-all” and others think that the children are in a structure that is too constrained. I have heard over and over again parents that are afraid that their children are not going to be able to be spontaneous or creative. Ms. Isaacs says, “...Montessori (1991) saw freedom as an essential component of the child’s emerging self-discipline, and as such, it carries social responsibility towards oneself as well as the group, appropriate to the age of the children. Thus, freedom is limited by the environment.” She goes on to talk about how ground rules are needed to ensure the children’s safety and well-being. These rules are to be discussed and negotiated with the children. Both children and adults have to adhere to the rules consistently.

Work Cycle – Cycle of Activity

The length of a work cycle depends on the child’s age and level of engagement. Children can work alone, or with a friend, or with a small group or with one of the teachers. The activities may take a few minutes or they may take longer. Children often repeat certain activities over and over again. The environment is set up so that each child is able to find spontaneously its own work.

Vertical Grouping

Montessori schools are set up with a certain mix of ages in each classroom. There are variations on this age grouping. Some children are grouped from birth to 3, 3-6, 6-9 and 9-12.

Vertical grouping is part of the Montessori belief that children learn best as a family or community. It is in these mixed age groupings that children start to develop social relationships and emotional well-being.

Control of Error

Dr. Montessori talks about the **autodidactic (self-teaching)** nature of the materials in a Montessori classroom. Many of the materials that are used in activities are self-correcting. Another aid that Montessori teachers use are “**control cards.**” A child uses a control card so they can check their own work. Both of these are designed to cut down on a child’s dependence for adult help. Ms. Isaac’s says, “The fact that Montessori referred to her materials as autodidactic does not automatically mean that all the activities have a built-in control of error. Another aspect to consider is the fact that children need to be able to perceive the error in order to control it (Morris-Coole 2007). Practitioners do not always know or understand fully what engages children, particularly the younger ones. Often it is the sensory quality of the materials which attracts them.”

Scaffolding

Each of the Montessori activities is carefully designed so that the children learn a new skill/concept and then they add the next step in building up their knowledge. We do this in small and manageable parts so that the child is successful.

3 Period Lesson

The 3 Period Lesson is a key teaching tool for the Montessori teacher to use to help introduce a child to new vocabulary.

1. **Stage one** – the object is isolated and given a name.
2. **Stage two** – the name is repeated for reinforcement and then the child selects the appropriate object.
3. **Stage three** – the child may be able to name the object.

Observation and Assessments

Montessori teachers conduct daily observations of each child using a variety of methods. The teacher may do the following:

1. Brief notes of each child's achievements/sayings/interests.
2. Use a dated checklist such as the Individual Learning Plan.
3. Use a variety of guides or student tracking forms to make longer narrative observations (levels of engagement with materials, their problem-solving and thinking skills, language and manipulative skills, responses to friends/peers/adults).
4. Use photos/videos/samples of child's work

Ms. Isaacs says, "Montessori recognized early on that formal tests are not beneficial to the children's learning and development at any age. Her main focus was on the levels of concentration and engagement in activities which children chose to do. For this purpose, she used the **Curve of Work**. Today's Montessori teachers combine the **Curve of Work** with the **Leuven Scale of Engagement** to measure not only the length of engagement but also the level."

Promoting Self-Discipline

Dr. Montessori said, "...an individual is disciplined when he is master of himself and he can, as a consequence, control himself when he must follow the rule of life."

Ms. Isaacs said, "For Montessori, obedience and self-discipline go hand-in-hand with an environment which offers children freedom within limits and with responsibility appropriate to their development and maturity. The key lies in positive role modeling and in opportunities to engage in self-chosen activities. This freedom fulfills the inner needs of the child and promotes concentration and deep engagement, which are essential to emerging self-discipline."

Moment to Pause and Think! Take some time to think about the 8 Key Principles this chapter talks about and consider if you are incorporating all of them in your classroom or home setting.

Chapter 4 – part 3 – Learning and Teaching

Learning Across the Age Groups

This part of the chapter starts out with the author high-lighting the different elements found in a Montessori environment:

4. Children’s learning reflects their developmental stages/maturity/interests.
5. Environment is organized.
6. Proper length of work-cycle.
7. Focus on the individual learning and development.
8. Children not expected to participate in all whole-class lessons/circle times.
9. Principle of freedom of choice is firmly rooted in all activities.
10. Children have “snack” when they are ready for it.
11. Small groups participate in singing/story-time/etc.
12. Democratic decision-making.

Learning in the Children’s House (3 to 6 year olds)

Classrooms are set up with the following:

1. Focus on learning through the senses and manipulation.
2. Activities displayed on open shelves.
3. Child has freedom to choose own activities.
4. New concepts and conceptual frameworks are established.
5. Seeds of interest and knowledge are sown.

Ms. Isaacs says, “The strong foundations laid in the early stages lead them to success in learning at the next stage, having gained competence and self-assurance in the skills and activities they enjoyed at nursery, as well as having grown in their social skills.”

Social aspects include:

1. Guidance for each child towards social life by example.
2. Guidance for each child by providing etiquette and structure during the sharing of activities.

Ms. Isaacs says, "All these aspects of learning foster children's well-being. The gradual emergence of initiative and self discipline is the hallmark of a successful Montessori nursery education."

Partnership with Parents

Dr. Montessori believed in the need for a strong and supportive relationship between children and their parents. These are some of the things that she believed:

1. Babies and toddler should participate in the everyday life of the family through shopping/meals/outings, etc.
2. Very young children absorb all aspects of human existence.
3. Parents need to understand the aims of the Montessori pedagogy.
4. Parents should make sure that children have easy access to their toys/activities.
5. Parents should work with children so they put away toys/activities when finished.
6. Parents should attend any Montessori school parent education classes or meetings.

Ms. Isaacs finishes this chapter up saying this about parents, "...if we want to nurture the child's true potential, we need to trust and respect him/her. We need to provide an interesting environment which fosters freedom and independence from which initiative will emerge as the child matures. We also need to acknowledge that the freedom has to carry some responsibility in order to protect the social aspects of our lives and support the emergence of the child's self-discipline."

Moment to Pause and Think! Do you agree that carrying the Montessori "principles" in both the classroom and at home is in the best interest of the child? Did you find something you are going to change in the classroom or at home?

Chapter 5 – part 1 – The Favorable Environment

In this chapter we will be talking about what key features make up a learning environment that facilitates children's learning.

Dr. Montessori said, "Adults admire the environment: they can remember it and things about it; but the child absorbs it. The things he sees are not just remembered; they form part of his soul. He incarnates in himself the world around him..."

The Montessori environment is designed to promote children's development by offering them freedom of movement, choice and expression. In order to accomplish this, the environment needs to respond to the child's developmental needs and support the sensitive periods.

- All of the materials need to be displayed on open shelves at a level in which a child can choose their own activity.

- Safety is considered to be of great importance. Ms. Isaacs says, "Children are afforded trust and respect while being supported by careful instruction, ongoing supervision and opportunities to perfect their skills through repetition until they become competent users of all utensils and tools in the setting."

Below is a list of common characteristics that should be found in Montessori classrooms:

4. Vertical grouping of children (mixed ages).
5. Easy access for children to move from indoor to outdoor environments.
6. Enough floor and table space to allow the children to work alone or with others.
7. The materials are set up in order to support free choice.
8. Each activity has its own place and is always set up and ready for the children.
9. The classroom walls are not over-decorated so that the children are able to focus on the materials.
10. Any wall decorations are at eye level with the children.
11. All of the materials should be pleasing for a child to look at and work with.
12. Nature should be visible in the classroom.
13. Wherever possible, children are offered real experiences.
14. The classroom atmosphere is calm, relaxing and harmonious.

Ms. Isaacs ends this part of the chapter saying, "Montessori believed that this type of physical environment promotes engagement and fosters purposeful activity. The calmness and harmony nourish the child's spirit, which is strengthened further by adults' respect and trust in the child's ability to lead his/her learning."

Moment to Pause and Think! Is the learning environment you have set up for children one that promotes children's development? Do you offer them freedom of movement, choice and expression? Is there something you should change or improve upon?

Chapter 5 – part 2 – The Favorable Environment

Organization of the Learning Environments

Infant/Toddler Classrooms

The author begins with a discussion about the environments found inside infant/toddler classrooms. You will find that she talks about various activities for infants/toddlers + language development + supporting independence. She ends with an example of a day in the life of a child in an infant/toddler classroom. Since this course covers children in the 2-6 year old (nursery) range, I will not go into the details for this age group.

Pre-School Classrooms

The environment for children in the 2-6 year old range is set up intentionally to help children make choices. There are plenty of open shelves full of beautifully arranged materials. I think it is important to note that Dr. Montessori did not write a comprehensive overview of what the materials needed to be in the classroom. I believe that the “materials” are important but the “process” is more important. This is why in this course we talk a lot about how to make materials and how to re-purpose some materials, etc.

The author see the Montessori classroom divided into these 7 areas:

1. Practical life
2. Education of the Senses
3. Numeracy and Arithmetic
4. Literacy
5. Cultural Studies
6. Creativity
7. Outdoor Learning

Practical Life

The overall objective for the Practical Life area is to guide children as they develop skills that help them to become independent in every day life. The Montessori teacher makes and/or puts together most of the activities you find in this area of the classroom. The activities fall under three broad categories; manipulative skills, care for the environment and care of self.

Education of the Senses

The overall objective for this area of the classroom is to guide the child through activities that help to develop the senses. These include activities that work with visual sense, chromatic sense, tactile sense, auditory sense, baric sense, sense of temperature, sense of taste and smell, etc. The child begins to explore shapes. There are many activities that provide for direct and indirect preparation for later learning.

Numeracy and Arithmetic

The overall objective is for the child to explore concepts of matching, pairing, sorting and sequencing. They also work with concepts of estimation, symmetry and one-to-one correspondence. The activities cover counting to 10, introduction to the decimal system using

the golden bead materials, group operations using the golden beads and numbers from 10 to 99.

Literacy

The overall objective is for the child to develop language and communication skills. Activities include exposure to books, storytelling, proper use of grammar, listening skills, etc., prepare the child for reading and writing.

Dr. Montessori said, **“The child can find an intense intellectual interest in being able to represent a word by putting together the...symbols of letters of the alphabet. It is a much more fascinating at the beginning to create words from letters of the alphabet than to read them, and it is also much easier than writing them since writing involves the additional labour of mechanisms that are not yet fixed.”**

Children work with insets for design, geometric stencils that are used in a variety of ways that promote pencil control and lightness of touch as well as creating patterns. Sandpaper letters and the moveable alphabet are used to build words. The Montessori reading scheme is divided into three levels (Pink, Blue, Green).

Cultural Studies

The overall objective is for the child to have the opportunity to explore their interests and to learn how to find answers to their questions. This area covers Physical Science, Botany, Zoology, Geography, etc. Children become aware that they are part of the world and promote the Montessori concept of being a **Citizen of the World**.

Ms. Isaacs says, **“It is usual for children in Montessori nurseries to learn about careful use of the planet’s resources and children are introduced to recycling and repairing damaged equipment such as books.”**

Creativity

The overall objective is for children to be given opportunities to explore and be creative. Ms. Isaacs says, **“Creativity is seen broadly as a way of embracing all that the child engages in, as well as the area where children are introduced to arts and crafts, music, dancing, books and storytelling.”**

Outdoor Learning

The overall objective is for children to be encouraged to participate in activities that are found outside in the same manner in which the inside environment has been set up. There should be a free-flow access between the inside and outside classroom whenever possible.

The author ends with an example of a day in the life of a child in a 2-6 year old classroom.

Primary (lower elementary) Classrooms

Ms. Isaacs writes about how the learning environment is set up for older children.

Moment to Pause and Think! Take some time to go over the learning environment you have set up to make sure that you have all of the “areas” represented. Remember that you don’t have to have everything right now...but, you do need to work towards making sure that you cover the main areas so that each child has a “firm foundation.”

Chapter 5 – part 3 – The Favorable Environment

The Role of the Adult in Preparing the Environment

This part of the chapter starts out with a quote from Dr. Montessori saying, **“The teacher’s first duty is ... to watch over the environment, and this takes precedence over all the rest. Its influence is indirect but unless it be well done there will be no effective and permanent results of any kind, physical intellectual or spiritual.”**

Next, we have a quote from Ms. Isaacs, **“The adults supporting children’s learning and development in Montessori classrooms must first and foremost respect each individual child by recognizing their qualities and characteristics, and trust in their developmental path as they guide the child’s educational progress.”**

The author charges the teacher with 6 responsibilities:

1. The teacher needs to be **current with the knowledge on child development**. This includes Dr. Montessori’s belief in the formation of man as well as other professionals in the field of Early Childhood Development.
2. The teacher needs to know **how to use the Montessori didactic materials** and understand the contribution each one makes to the child’s learning.
3. The teacher needs to **understand the principles of the Montessori activities and materials and how they are formulated** so they can add extensions and variations. This will help the teacher know which commercial materials can be added to the Montessori materials.
4. The teacher needs to be **proficient in the art of observation of the child**.
5. The teacher needs to know **how to interpret her observations of the child** so that the knowledge can be applied to the best interest of each child.
6. The teacher should be **able to reflect on her knowledge and ability** and continue to grow with ongoing professional development and personal growth.

The author lists 4 elements that significantly contribute in the teachers' commitment to the children:

1. Their **respect** for the child is evident in the way the teacher sets up the environment for the children.
2. Their **trust** in the children's ability to choose their own work.
3. Their **non-judgmental** approach to the activities in which the children choose to do.
4. Their **understanding** of the individual temperaments and rhythms of each child.

Ms. Isaacs ends this chapter saying, "The teacher is the role model of the behaviors which foster such attitudes; s/he is deliberate in speech and movement, and conveys kindness, consideration and consistency in expectations from the children."

Moment to Pause and Think! How are you doing as a Montessori educator? Do you respect each child? Do you trust that each child will choose the work that they need to do? Are you non-judgmental towards each child's choice of work? Do you understand that each child is unique and honor and celebrate the individual?

Chapter 6 – part 1 – The Benefits and Challenges of the Montessori Approach to Children's Lives and Communities of Today

This is the final chapter in this book. The author touches upon the following:

1. Critiques on Montessori education.
2. Reflections on the benefits of this individual approach to a child's development.
3. Discusses how the Montessori Method links with current research.

Steven Hughes, a Neuropsychologist, said, "**Children come out of Montessori education understanding there is a richness and diversity to human culture and there's also a sameness. We all want love, we have families, we care about people, we do not want to live on a barren planet and we need to respect everyone's pursuit of these things. That's a basic but critical Lesson of socialization, and it's something children get very well in Montessori.**"

Below are some reasons as to why Montessori education is currently being discussed worldwide:

15. **International** interest is strongly focused on the individual child and the child's ability to direct their own learning by freedom of choice given in a Montessori classroom.

16. **Parental** interest due to acknowledging that education as a means to their child's financial success as an adult needs to be expanded to include personal satisfaction and ability to cope with daily challenges.
17. **Governments** have an increase of understanding that pre-school education is important and is a significant contributor in the laying of a firm foundation for children.
18. **Neuroscience** research has confirmed Dr. Montessori's early understanding of how the brain functions. Now, Montessori education is known to improve and develop the brain during the early years through contact with the environment. So the science has caught up to support the Montessori pedagogy.

Moment to Pause and Think! Take some time to think about how amazing Dr. Montessori was during her lifetime to have come up with a way to enhance the brain's development during specific times (absorbent mind/sensitive periods). Take another few moments to feel "grateful" for her contributions and for the honor to connect to children in such a reverent way.

Chapter 6 – part 2 – The Benefits and Challenges of the Montessori Approach to Children's Lives and Communities of Today

Challenges

The author starts out by making the point that she believes that the current criticism of the Montessori approach is linked to the limited amount of knowledge of Montessori's writings and the misuse of the approach in practice. Dr. Montessori herself did not protect the use of her own name. This makes it easy for anyone to open a "Montessori" school.

The groups that criticize the Montessori Method tend to believe that either the "Method" is too rigid and lacks in opportunities for creativity and social interactions or it is perceived as being too relaxed and without any structure. **Both of these criticisms are not accurate.** The truth can be found in the children that have benefited from attending Montessori classrooms. These children tend to be sociable, creative and imaginative. They have the ability to self-direct their actions and organize themselves and others. They are enthusiastic and committed to learning.

Many believe that the main misunderstanding arises from the misinterpretation of the role of work and play in a Montessori setting. The Montessori classroom views work as play and play as work. Montessori teachers use real objects and experiences as the basis for learning by young children. Those that criticize feel that the practice does not promote imagination through roll playing, etc.

Ms. Isaacs says, "However, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence from case studies and classroom observations conducted by practitioners which demonstrates that children attending

Montessori schools engage in spontaneous symbolic play, enjoy positive relationships and social interactions, and take part in activities that are full of creative imagination.”

Current Issues

1. Over the years, it has been perceived that Montessori education is for the middle classes or well-to-do in society. There are many “expensive” schools which many parents cannot afford to send their children to. I feel that this is very sad. Dr. Montessori’s vision was for her method to be available to all children in the world.
2. Teacher Training is another issue because the few Montessori branches train their teachers in isolation. These “main” branches do not communicate with each and therefore do not “grow” in strength by supporting each other. There is a tendency for each “branch” to feel that they have the most “pure” take on the Montessori Method. Currently there is more conversation among the training centers and there are more choices as to where you can obtain your training. As you know, this course was the first “online” teacher-training course. It is also the least expensive by thousands of dollars. It is also the first one that acknowledges those that wish to work with their children at home. This course was the first, and still is, the only training course that includes a set of 12 Montessori Manuals!
3. Ms. Isaacs also feels that the quality of delivery of Montessori education to children is problematic. There are various and different (some just self-appointed) regulatory organizations that are trying to bring all of the Montessori schools into delivering the same education in all of the classrooms throughout the world. It is my opinion that this is not an appropriate expectation due to the differences in the various countries of the world. I believe that if we are “following the child” then we cannot be about following a perfectly set way of doing everything the same.

I agree that it would be wonderful for an accreditation process that would ensure that certain key principles of Montessori education were adhered to. I feel that the reason this is not possible is because there are many different interpretations over details that distract Montessori educators from focusing on those main principles that really are the most important.

4. Ms. Isaacs talks about the importance for Montessori educators to share and continue to grow along with other professionals. As you all know, I am all about this and that is why I consider myself a “Progressive Montessori Educator.” The author says, “Over the years the Montessori movement has been hindered by isolation and a lack of ability to share what it has to offer with the wider education community. This may be due to ineffective communication and defensive attitudes by Montessorians who find it hard to promote and celebrate their practice when scrutinized.”

Retaining Focus on the Individual Child

Ms. Isaacs finishes this chapter and her book by saying:

“The focus on the individual child’s developing potential is the strength of the approach and is much valued by the parents whose children attend Montessori settings. However, this focus on the individual may be one of the barriers which prevent governments from embracing Montessori education more fully. Social responsibility supported and delivered by strong individuals presents a real challenge not only to many teachers but also to politicians. We are still far away from the social change heralded by Montessori in her vision of a future society where individuals will act responsibly and sensitively in relation to each other and the planet, so that society and the Earthy can thrive.”

Moment to Pause and Think! There is a lot that you can do to promote a clear understanding about the Montessori Method to others. Please make sure that you take the time to share the benefits of a Montessori education. Be proud that you have added “following the child” to your life and the lives of the children around you!

Well, I hope you have enjoyed this book! Next, week we are going to start our final book study. You do not need to buy or borrow this book. Adding a copy to your personal library is optional and not required.

Blessings and Hugs!
Karen