

montessori

montessori educational programs international



OPEN FORUM

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Photograph taken by Kristie Norwood
at the MEPI Hands for Peace Conference 2007

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Presidential Notes.....

My professional goal is to generate quality educational programs based on Montessori philosophy and principles. I practice and support this goal as a founder and director of the Athens Montessori School, serving over 270 students from ages 3 to 14. In addition, I head the EP A Lifespan Childcare Center for ages 6 weeks to 6 years old. I train Montessori Primary teachers throughout the southeast region and participate in the leadership of two international training organizations and in the instruction of several programs serving both the public and private sector of education. The scientific foundations, worldwide practice and continuous refinement of Montessori practices position Montessori Education as a proven model for true educational reform.

Maria Montessori regarded teachers as directors of the unfolding drama of self-development and construction of the individual personality. My twenty-five years working in the Primary classroom have confirmed the validity of Montessori practice in both my heart and my mind. Most educational reforms I have read about or studied seem like fragments of the wholistic solutions inherent in well-practiced Montessori Education.

The challenges of creating a facility and quality Montessori programs for all stages of development up to high school, has focused my process of creating an inspired vision, well defined short and long term goals and a careful plan of implementation matched to the skills and talents of the participants. I have used this process of consensus gathering to advise arts' groups, youth athletic associations and most importantly, public and private Montessori schools.

My presentation skills are continually enriched through, not only frequent speeches and workshops, but also through regular performances as an actor and long time membership of an improvisational ensemble. I have implemented my theatre experiences to write and direct original children's shows and to provide community entertainment. All of my experiences with children, parents, colleagues and the community have sustained my enthusiasm and optimism for generating a more invigorated and moral society through quality education, the arts and community involvement.

The program for a Masters of Education degree at Kennesaw State University will afford me the opportunity to continue my research into human development, brain based research, wholistic education and the role of the arts in education.

This degree will also strengthen my position to continue training Montessori teachers and allow me to serve as adjunct faculty in a college or university setting.

I believe my long successful practice and vigorous engagement with children, staff, parents and community will enable me to participate fully and offer unique perspectives to the learning community at Kennesaw State University.



An Award-Winning Column

Teaching Transcendence

Transcendence refers to the universal virtue that consists of the ability to express an appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor and spirituality. Positive psychologists see these characteristics as being part of 24 personality strengths that create healthy and happy people.

The virtue of transcendence helps us create connections to everything in the universe. These connections in turn help us create meaning and understanding in our lives. William Blake in his "Auguries of Innocence" wrote:

**To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.**

It is the power of transcendence that helps us connect a grain of sand to eternity. With our observations and understanding we begin to notice beauty and appreciate excellence in all aspects of the world.

No matter how modest our circumstances, we can learn to see the beauty that surrounds us. It is this ability to see the wonder-filled, the awe-inspiring and the miraculous that helps give our life meaning and sustenance.

Developing an attitude of gratitude creates another character strength. Being thankful for our lives, the people in our lives, our experiences, our comforts and even our tough times creates a resiliency in our character. This resiliency sustains us during the times that our lives on this planet are not going as expected. Taking time to express thanks to those around us and to a higher power will develop an inner strength that is not easily diminished.

The ability to laugh and make others laugh, to see the humor in a situation, to see the sunny side of the street when walking in the shadows--these are skills that keep us from being swallowed by self-pity. If human beings couldn't laugh, the universe would be sucked into a black hole. Cultivating a sense of humor, as they say, is the best medicine.

Hope and optimism are habits we all should practice and learn. Believing and working everyday to better ourselves and our world creates a life-affirming positive attitude that is difficult to extinguish no matter the hardship. As an old English adage says, "Hope for the best. Prepare for the worst. And be happy with whatever you get."

The character strength of spirituality, or holding beliefs about having a higher purpose in the scope of the universe, creates success and inner peace. Hallmarks of happy and resilient people are the ability to feel a connection with a higher power, along with having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.

As we nurture our children let us remember to stop and appreciate the beauty that surrounds us. Let's help children learn how to show thanks for their lives and everything in it. Let's teach them how to laugh at themselves and to see the humor in a situation. When times get tough, let's display a spirit of hope and optimism, by pointing the way to the future. Last, but not least, let us show our children that we are spiritual beings having a human experience.

The Child Has Time-Sensitive Opportunities for Growth

“No.”

If we could have one word to associate with a two-year-old, it would be the word “no.”

When a two-year-old realizes that he or she has the power to decide by saying a simple “yes” or “no,” we can observe a time-sensitive period in a child’s development. Establishing independence around age two and exerting a self-directed will are an inherent growth pattern in all of us.

We can expect two-year-olds to express their wills both verbally and physically. This expression is part of the natural human process of realizing that you are an individual, with particular needs. Around age six, children begin to develop a sense of belonging to a group and become aware that the group has specific needs and desires, outside each individual. Until that juncture in development, it is unrealistic for us to expect a child to understand others’ needs.

There are natural times in a person’s life when learning about how to become an individual, how to walk, how to talk and how to become part of a group are part of the innate process of human development. When a person fails to acquire certain skills at these important times, the effects can have long-term significance.

We know that if a child doesn’t speak by the age of six, the chances are the child will never speak. This is due to a sensitive period of language development in children from birth to the age of six.

Before the age of six, children are in a period of growth when learning appears effortless. The child absorbs information and learns from interactions with the world. We don’t have to teach a child how to walk or talk because of these instinctive periods of development for language and movement.

Through their sixth year, children are in five developmental periods. What are these periods of growth and how can we support this development?

We can support this time of learning by being aware that this developmental growth is driving children’s behavior. As we watch our children, we can see that they are attracted to activities in these five areas:

- 1. Language**
- 2. Movement**
- 3. Sensory perception**
- 4. Understanding of the order of people, places and things**
- 5. Developing social skills and relationships**

Children are drawn to activities that help them create language, both spoken and written. They are acquiring motor skills, both large and small, and have a need to be involved in actions that use their whole body and/or hands. Hand and eye coordination are developing, along with the senses of taste, smell and touch.

Understanding what noises to pay attention to is also part of children’s normal process. For example, the child is learning to discern which is more important, the voices on the television or the adults in the room?

Understanding the order to everyday life, the significance of people in the child’s life and the physical orderliness of the surrounding world guides the child’s behavior, and a disruption in that perceived order could create disturbances in the child’s behavior.

The child is interested in how to interact with others and easily learns a multitude of social skills, such as saying “please” and “thank you.” The child is also creating a foundation for interpersonal relationships, while learning how to treat family and close friends.

These five time-sensitive areas for learning in the child create a driving force for the child’s actions, demeanor and conduct. When you can recognize these forces of development within the child, you can be of genuine assistance as the child creates his or her unique personality and becomes an individual who contributes to the whole.

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Finding Seeds of Appreciation and Gratitude

In our worst traits lay the seeds of our best traits.

In those moments when we criticize behavior, we have an opportunity. If we take the time to shift our perception and look for the positive in the situation, we will find a quality to appreciate.

In those moments when we might be critical, we can make a conscious choice to react to the world in a different way. Instead of feeling irritable and angry while looking for evidence to justify our feelings, we can ask ourselves, "What can I appreciate in this situation? What am I thankful for? How can I express my gratitude?"

Our criticism of others sometimes reflects our intolerance for our own shortcomings.

Pet peeves. We all have them. We can either feed our pet peeves or delve into these annoyances to discover the seeds of a positive trait.

Being hit with a grocery cart in the checkout line used to be one of my pet peeves. Pushy people inching their carts closer and closer in the narrow aisle as my groceries moved toward the cashier drove me crazy. Bumping me more than once as I attempted to write a check was the ultimate annoyance.

As I pushed my bags to the car, I inwardly fumed, "Can you believe that person! Who does he think he is? Why couldn't he keep his cart back ten inches for ten more seconds! Harrumph!"

In some of my studies I came across the idea that perhaps I was critical of my fellow shopper because he reflected my own impatience. My pet peeves were me, reflected back to me. Very interesting.

Next shopping trip, I resolved to be more patient and to not to be in a hurry to get out of the store. As part of my experiment, I offered my place in line to the person behind me. "Please go next. I'm not in a hurry."

The person following me, instead of pushing their cart forward, stayed a respectful distance back. The shopper in front of me expressed appreciation and kindness.

After this venture, instead of feeling like a bruised and harassed shopper, I left the store feeling kind and appreciated by the other folks in line.

In this way, I discovered that one of my less desirable characteristics, impatience, held the seed to one of my finer traits, kindness.

In our criticism of our children, let us look at their behavior in such a way so that we can discover the seed of their positive features or strengths.

When we see messiness, perhaps we can look for creativity, spontaneity or imagination and appreciate those qualities.

When we think our children are rude, perhaps we might see the seeds of assertiveness, shyness, expressiveness or honesty, and then we might help them express those qualities in a positive manner.

When we are irritated by noise or constant requests for attention from our children, let us consider appreciating their lovingness, their energy, their enthusiasm, their strength and their humor.

Look for the seeds of positive qualities at those times when you might be thinking, "Why does he have to do that!"

Here are a few positive qualities where you might consider placing your appreciation: Energetic, Honest, Loyal, Intelligent, Brave, Sensitive, Thoughtful, Cheerful, Gracious, Playful, Caring, Exciting, Committed, Active, Adventurous, Responsible, Reliable, Resourceful, Athletic, Funny, Calm, Assertive, Understanding, Creative, Affectionate, Interesting, Honest, Kind, Friendly, Protective, Gentle, Generous, Strong, Coordinated, Graceful, Diligent and Trustworthy.

Research shows that giving people five bits of honest and earned appreciation per day creates strong and supportive relationships. Next time you feel critical, take the time to identify the finer qualities that are hidden in the situation. Express your appreciation for these traits with a simple "thank you." Remember, the seed we feed grows.

My Reluctant Montessori Transformation

By Leslie Kniggendorf

It was my first night of Montessori Teacher Preparation and I wanted to leave...

Our instructor, Shirley Steckleberg, was giving our class a run-down of what was in store for us. She spoke of the internships, the demonstration checklist and briefly touched upon a "spiritual" or personal transformation that we would all likely go through as we journeyed forth as Montessori Teachers.

"Personal Transformation?" No thanks, Shirley. At that point, my hand was in my pocket clutching my keys and I was looking back at the clock, wondering if I could make it home before dark.

If my boss tells me to change something, I do it. But those demands are work related. It is my job to comply. Shirley was telling me that I had to do something outside of work. I was already an assistant at a Montessori school and I loved it. My class was an enormous bright spot in my life. So, what needed to change? With much apprehension and suspicious mind that was held open just barely, I stuck around.

Weeks passed as I went to class and waited to become someone else. All the while, I kept one eyebrow firmly arched with doubt as if I was expecting Shirley to hypnotize us. So, I waited...and waited...and my apartment was still messy. I continued to put off eating healthier food, and I still woke up too late every morning to look as nice as I'd like for work. Clearly, I was too strong to fall under Shirley's spell.

It was around the fourth month of my training when I began noticing bizarre behavior. I began walking everywhere (stores, restaurants, home, school) slowly and with my hands behind my back. I was speaking in a voice I didn't recognize; a quiet voice. If I noticed a child struggling with something, I wouldn't rush to his side and offer to help. I would wait and most of the timer her would solve his own problem. I was using my voice less. I was getting respect from the children and standing up just a little it taller with the confidence in the classroom that I had attained. It can be nerve wrecking to have all of those eyes staring up at you and 3-6 year olds can be a harsh audience. The stage fright I once had standing in front of them at ellipse time had faded. I was now able to concentrate completely on them rather than worrying about messing something up. I was finally feeling like a Good Teacher.

Is this what Shirley meant by a Change? If so, I did not see it coming and I don't think it will go as long as I am a teacher. I spent time needlessly worrying that I would never be graceful enough or calm enough to be a Montessorian. I am aware of how cliché I sound, but every single day I am learning something from these children. I am picking up on the behavior patterns of four year old girls so I can calmly tell a worried father that his daughter's "obsession" with princess parties is nothing to be concerned about (this happened very recently). I am learning that reacting to certain situations with the children might amplify the problem. Also, I am constantly creating things. For example, I can't go on a trip without picking up postcards to laminate; I sit at home in the evening and cut up National Geographic magazines for my continent folders. I am happy about all of this.

My apartment is still messy and I still don't look very nice in the mornings, but I am a better person now. I am a nicer person and I smile more because I have learned through lectures, class discussions, and required reading (especially Nurturing the Spirit by Aline D. Wolf) that the job of the educator is not to control but to introduce, to guide, to assist. My job everyday is to hand out keys and describe to the children what exciting things await. I will show the children how to unlock the door, though ultimately it becomes their decision whether or not to use the key. I have more confidence in myself after receiving training. This is a gift I did not expect and something that cannot be taken away.





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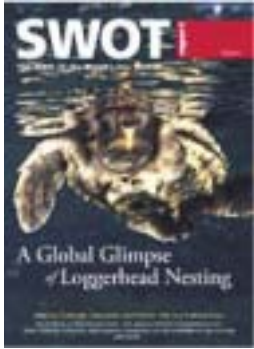
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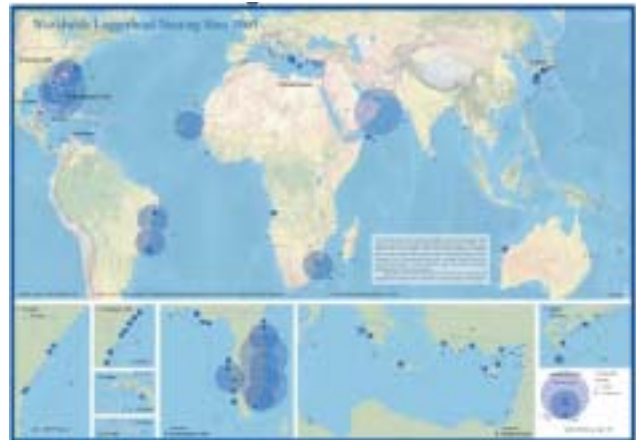
SWOT – The State of the World’s Sea Turtles



The Earth’s seven species of sea turtle have survived more than 110 million years of evolution and geological change – outliving the dinosaur by more than 55 million years. Yet today, six of the seven species of sea turtles are listed by the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species as either endangered or critically endangered.

All threats to the sea and sea turtles come from people. Hence, conservation strategies must focus on changing human behaviors, and indeed, awareness is growing. Much like pandas and tigers have drawn interest to rainforest conservation, sea turtles can focus needed attention on ocean conservation issues. They are charismatic flagships for communicating the broad and often complex concepts of marine conservation to the public. Sea turtles embody the sea’s mystery and majesty.

SWOT seeks to pursue not just a single snapshot of the status of the world’s sea turtles, but a permanent, annually updated tool for monitoring our success and setting priorities for conservation work worldwide. This initiative is centered around a global communications strategy, using the SWOT Report as an outreach and advocacy tool aimed not only at sea turtle researchers and conservationists, but also at those who are able to have a significant impact on marine conservation by making simple changes in their daily lives – the general public. This engaging, easy-to-read publication includes articles ranging across a broad spectrum of themes, from the unsolved mysteries of sea turtle conservation to lessons on safe seafood choices. For more information on SWOT, or to join the SWOT Team, visit our website at: www.SeaTurtleStatus.org.



The Great Turtle Race

In the Great Turtle Race (www.GreatTurtleRace.com), conservation science meets public appeal. Eleven charismatic leatherback sea turtles—living dinosaurs—have been tagged with satellite equipment on a long migration from Costa Rica to the Galapagos Islands. Each turtle has been sponsored by a major corporation or educational institution, and every online viewer of the Great Turtle Race will have a chance to cheer on his or her favorite turtle throughout the race.



The data collected from these tagged turtles will be used to help conservation scientists better understand the marine environment and the lifecycles of these critically endangered sea turtles. Funds raised in the campaign will help protect the leatherbacks’ nesting beach. Lessons learned by the general public will help them understand how seafood dinners, plastic bags from the local store, and climate change all affect the survival of this 100-million-year-old sea creature. And through it all, the Great Turtle Race is going to be a whole lot of fun.

This online event will raise funds to protect Playa Grande and raise awareness about what we can all do—no matter where we live—to help protect sea turtles in our daily actions.

This race presents a valuable opportunity to bring the conservation of this ancient mariner to the classroom. The Great Turtle Race website features interactive content designed to be engaging and easy-to-follow. Students will have a chance to pick a favorite turtle, follow it along its journey, and witness the many obstacles the turtle will face along the way—including plastic bags (often mistaken for jellyfish, the leatherback’s primary food source) and other marine debris; fishing lines, nets, and trawls; changes in the ocean caused by climate change; and many other human-created hazards. Suggested curriculum developed specifically for the Great Turtle Race is available on the race website. This can be used throughout the race and afterward to promote marine conservation to students of all ages in an attractive and entertaining format.



Leatherback turtles have traversed the world’s oceans for over 100 million years, yet they may have only ten years left before extinction. They are going faster than you think – visit www.GreatTurtleRace.com to find out how you can help.



“Join Mr. Leatherback, emcee of The Great Turtle Race, in his quest to save his species at www.myspace.com/mrleatherback”



calendar of events

Contact us to list your conferences, etc. in our Calendar of Events www.mepiforum.org

2007

September 14th - 16th Hands for Peace Midwest Conference --Kansas City, MO

2008

February 22nd - 24th Hands for Peace Midwest Conference --Myrtle Beach, SC

June 18th - 21st International Montessori Congress - Croatia

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