

OPEN FORUM

The on-line newsletter of *Montessori Educational Programs International*



A Quarterly Newsletter

June 2016

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Drops of Peace to ripple across our world

A smile is the beginning of Peace



Sing a joyful song

Practice forgiveness and compassion



Be respectful in your thoughts, your words and your actions

Be a good citizen



Conference 2017

Save the Date!

*February 24 - 26, 2017
Kiawah Island Golf Resort*



“Ever-Widening Circles”

*with Keynote by
Jonathan Wolff*

*Many new topics and
presenters !*

*Make your plans NOW to
attend!*

Congratulations to our newly elected MEPI Board members!



Dr Aja Staniszewski comes to us from Las Vegas, Nevada where she directs our newest MEPI teacher education program.

Aja has a masters in Montessori Education and her doctorate in Educational Psychology & Integrative Medicine.

She has worked in the Montessori field since 1999 and we are excited to have her joining us on our Board of Directors!



La Dene Conroy hails from Mt Pleasant , South Carolina and has been involved in many aspects of Montessori for over 30 years.

La Dene has two Master's degrees from The Citadel and currently works with adult learners in Montessori education.

We are looking forward to having her expertise on our Board!



Nicoletta Householder resides in Eden, Utah with her husband and 2 children.

She has her Masters in Montessori Education and currently teaches Upper Elementary at Maria Montessori Academy in Utah.

Nicoletta has been elected to serve a 2nd term on our Board and we are pleased to have her returning!

And welcoming back by appointment

Dr John Moncure

Camden, South Carolina



President's Message - Martha Teien

What does your summer look like? How long does it take you to wind down? These are a few of the questions asked of me during the final days of the academic year. But the queries confuse me greatly as a leader and as a teacher. Our school closed its doors for the school year on Wednesday, May 25. However, those doors re-open June 6 for our summer camp. This does not offer much time to recharge and reorganize a program. But it does allow me some mental space to prepare for the future. Here is my plan for the summer and I hope it helps you in organizing your precious time.

First, *sleep*. You know it is one of the things that are sacrificed during the spring. From early spring conferences to late spring graduation I lose a little more sleep every night. I think I was down to 5-6 hours a night by the end of May and I am an 8-hour girl.

Second, I *choose my non-educational, non-self transformational, text*. I promise myself one great book. Any more commitment than that and there is a build up of resentment toward the world due to my lack of reading.

Third, *self-care*. I run. For you this may look a little different but this is the “me time” that gets sliced away as soon as the schedule demand gets intense. For others it might be gardening, hiking, pedicures... that little bit of self-care that allows us to then care for others.

Lastly, I *clean* my house. Now I know this does not sound relaxing but this is the deep clean – de-junk, reorganize, donate unused etc. I think this has become a ritual for me as my children move out for college. One has left every other year since 2008 and I process my grief and embrace the joy in watching them fly by reorganizing that space.

Yes... in a few weeks I will begin the process of reviewing my successes and my growth points in 2015-2016. I will begin to visualize the coming year. I will even work hard on finishing my MEPI School Accreditation so I can reach the GOLD level of Membership. But for right now it is time to take advantage of the less intense demands of being a Montessori Directress and energize my soul.

Imagine starting each day with a full pie. Every time you give a little to others, you give away a piece of your pie. When you help a crying child transition into the classroom, you have given them a slice of your pie. When you mentor your new teacher on how to communicate with a parent, goodbye slice. When you introduce Montessori to a new family, one less piece of pie for you. And as Montessorians, we joyfully give away a lot of pie. As I leave my doorstep each day my husband will say, “save some pie for me”. It’s his way of saying he loves me and he does not want me to give myself away every day and end up depleted. It’s so nice to have someone who understands.

My wish for you this summer is get baking. Lots of pies. All different kinds.
You are important.

Martha Teien



A Report on the Recent Meeting of the Montessori Leaders Collaborative (MLC)

By John Moncure, Ph.D.

The MLC met at the Montessori Center of Minnesota (MCM) St Paul, MN, May 2 and 3, 2016 to explore themes raised in previous meetings around professional development for teachers and administrators. The meeting was designed to identify gaps that teachers and administrators face and come up with some experiments that might address those gaps.

In advance of the meeting participants had received the findings of two surveys conducted in March and April; one of Montessori teachers, the other of administrators in Montessori programs. The group discussed the shortcomings of the surveys and how to overcome them with future surveys.

With the teacher survey, MLC members observed that responses varied depending on the experience of the teacher, with more experienced teachers reporting feeling more confident in their skills. Participants wondered how well teachers' confidence would correlate with external assessment of skill or knowledge: often teachers don't know what they don't know, and some may take credit for success because they have classes full of children of high socioeconomic status in a good environment.

Members also questioned whether workshops provide the assistance needed for real professional growth. Prioritizing the areas in which professional development is needed is key. Teachers reported a lot of interest in special needs and learning differences, reporting that they do not know how to apply Montessori principles to students who learn differently.

While the survey provides baseline data, the MLC needs to

understand the next steps to define how professional development should change.

The Administrators' survey suggested that as a group they were less confident in their abilities than teachers. They reported frequently lacking tools for Montessori-specific professional development or evaluation, and struggled to help teachers address children with learning differences or special needs. They said they wanted Montessori credentials but also say observation is not a priority, which the MLC members saw as a disconnect.

Rebecca Pelton said MACTE asks accredited organizations to provide concrete evidence to support their evaluations of their trained Montessori teachers, which can be in the form of grades or qualitative data. She appreciated the notion that evaluation can be done in a transformative way. It was pointed out that most private schools have an evaluation process that contributes to continuous improvement. There is general agreement about what constitutes high-quality practice under the Montessori model, and evaluation and professional development should build on that.

The group also discussed professional development and evaluation of teachers and participated in an exercise intended to deepen understanding of the challenges teachers and administrators face daily. These discussions will serve as the basis for future meetings and designs for additional initiatives. I will be happy to provide readers a fuller description of the panel discussion. MLC members then discussed "an unconstrained future" for teachers and administrators 5 years from now, which could serve as a basis for future discussions about how the ideal future aligns with current efforts. Initially, some participants pushed back against the idea, saying that the MLC members have already

envisioned the future and are ready to talk about concrete steps.

Others acknowledged that the members still operate in silos and would benefit from crafting a framework to help move efforts forward. Key concepts emerged for Montessori education in 2021: **Mission Focus:** Freedom from interference or burdensome restrictions (such as state mandates), Mission-driven leadership, & effective regulatory approaches

Training: Ready access to training. Common standards and guidelines for training that allow for diverse models. Clearly defined, high standards of professionalism that embody Montessori philosophy.

Career Development: Pipeline that supports novices. Career pathways. Opportunity and mindset for continuous growth and improvement. Communities of practice. One-on-one support.

Unity: Transparent articulation of best Montessori practice. Strong internal and external communication and a common message. Internal support for the Montessori movement.

The group then considered proposals for experiments that would be feasible, relevant, and relatively short in duration (i.e., completed within 2 years), and that could move the field closer to the 5-year vision of an unconstrained future. Participants agreed to move forward with two experiments and to hold a third for future discussion.

1st - to create an Institute for Montessori Professional Development that would establish general guidelines for professional development and address specific areas of need.

2nd - to create a collaborative conference bringing all Montessori organizations together around a common goal, such as research.

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Executive Coordinator Report - Mary Cusack



Plans are underway to prepare for our MEPI Summer Retreat in July.

This year, we are trying an on-line retreat over two days to allow our members the luxury to meet in comfort from their own homes, via computer! It is an experiment in the works!!

This is a time to initiate our new Board members in the workings of MEPI and a time to get down to brass tacks for the organizational duties which need to be re-visited yearly. Traditionally, it is our most productive meeting all year!

New leadership will be elected within our ranks, along with new committee chairs to run our organization successfully! Our Board is a dedicated group with willingness to jump right in to do whatever is necessary to get the job done!

MEPI was honored to be the recipient of a Sorenson Legacy Foundation Scholarship grant for Utah MEPI teacher preparation students. Scholarship funds are currently available for those wishing to pursue a career in Montessori education in the state of Utah. Please contact the MEPI office for further information.

Plans are progressing for our conference in February with workshop proposals coming in at a steady rate. We are excited to be returning to Kiawah Island, SC and now that we have 1 year under our belt on location, we feel much more confident with planning logistics!

We have some exciting new options for our conference which will be announced when all details have been finalized! Stay tuned!!

MEPI is now a proud supporter of the

2017 International
Montessori Congress

The Congress will be held in Prague, Czech Republic in July 2017.



International Montessori Congress
Prague, Czech Republic
27 – 30 July 2017

Pathway to Peace:
Montessori Education for Social Change

Visit the Congress website at:
www.MontessoriCongress2017.org

And....

If you haven't had the opportunity to check out our new website, please visit at:

www.mepiforum.org

New are:

- ~ job listings
- ~ a Montessori Blog,
- ~ current happenings
and
- ~Board of Director profiles.

Visit us also on Facebook at
MEPI,Inc

Intern's Insights

Imagination and Fantasy

Catherine Mathews
MEPI Intern

Batman is the superhero of choice for the largest part of the 12 boys in class 10. There was a real issue with physical confrontations at the beginning of the year and I spent some time determining what might be behind it all; a singular source or multiple ones. It seemed that whenever a child wore a t-shirt with a super-hero on it that child would become more aggressive towards the other children. I sent home an email requesting that children use other clothing if possible. Many of the parents were compliant and I saw a change in those children. However, when it began getting a little colder they all began bringing their jackets from home. Seven of the boys brought the same one to school, it was a Batman jacket that had a hood with a mesh mask that covered the eyes but still let the boys see through them (an educator's nightmare!). Two of them brought the Spiderman jacket of the same variety.

When they went outside in their jackets I observed that their behavior became very physical and confrontational with lots of acted violence. Several times their interactions with one another became

physically violent and some children needed a break from outside. This phenomena was so different than what we normally experienced outside that I was fairly certain it had to do with the sheer number of jackets. I decided that I would speak one-on-one with each of the parents about what had happened and ask them to not send those particular jackets to school. Most parents were very obliging.

A couple of others brought theirs to school a couple of times, but their peers kept telling them that we didn't bring that jacket to school anymore so they stopped. The fantasy violence that they were seeing portrayed on screen transmitted into acting out the violence at school. The acted violence at school transmitted into real violence towards other children.

While many erroneously believe that imagination and fantasy are the same thing, they are, in fact, not. Imagination and fantasy are distinctly different. Imagination is rooted in reality and is a creative expression of some known thing. Montessori believed that it is necessary for the child's mind to be engaged in something constructive. She saw the delving into the make-believe, or fantasy world as a sign of a mind without aim. "When a fugitive mind fails to find something upon which it may work, it becomes absorbed with images and symbols. Children who are afflicted with this disorder move restlessly about. They are lively, irrepressible, but without purpose. They start something only to leave it unfinished since their energies are directed toward many different objects without being able to settle upon any of them." *The Secret of Childhood*

During the 2014-15 school year I had a 4 year old student named John, whose old's mother was concerned

about him, as was I. He was having a difficult time discerning between his real life and what he watched on television. His mother admitted that he spent a lot of time watching television and playing video games at home because she just didn't know what to do with him. His favorite show was Power Rangers and he talked about and acted out the sequences from the show as if they were really happening. She had been the recipient of his fantasy violence several times. Whenever he was reprimanded at home he would get angry and shout that he would vaporize her dead. He then acted this out and proceeded to hit and kick her repeatedly. She was at a loss of what to do since she didn't want to take away his favorite show for fear that he would become even more angry and violent with her. He really wanted to go and see the new Avengers movie over the weekend, which his mother was using for him as a reward for his good behavior during the week.

I was really concerned about what things would be like for John when he came back to school after seeing this new live-action movie with so much violence that was so completely inappropriate for his age. The following Monday John needed to be removed from the classroom for violent behavior toward a particular boy in our class. He said he was his enemy and had to be destroyed. Over a period of several months John had daily violent episodes with his classmates to such an extent that none of the students were willing to sit near or even talk to him. I strove during work time to help open John up to work, but it was difficult.

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His mind seemed engaged and disengaged from the entire room at the same time. He moved about erratically, never staying on any work for any extended period of time, and frequently refusing to do anything at all, but still causing mayhem everywhere he went. There were no works on the shelf that were safe from his destructive movements. Nothing seemed to stir his soul, not even the dinosaur works his mother said he loved so well. The lines between reality and fantasy were severely blurred for this child. Because his mother continued to be absolutely unwilling to make any accommodations, such as trimming his screen time, he continued to be unsuccessful and stuck in a place of fantasy the entire time he was in my class. The administration did not allow John to stay and he left our school a few months into the year after threatening and harming other children on multiple occasions. I believed the constant exposure to live action shows such as Power Rangers were detrimental to his development, especially since his mother said she was too tired to think of something else for him to engage in. It seemed that his mind had little else to do, while he was away from school, besides retreat into the realm of fantasy, and that it had been that way for some time. I felt that there may have been other things at play with John, and I hope that he has been able to get the help he needed.

In contrast to the realm of fantasy, a child who uses their imagination attaches themselves to some real object or "In the surroundings which we provide for them we see these children immediately attach themselves to some task. Their excited fantasies and restless movements

disappear and calmly face reality and begin to perfect themselves through their work. They become normal children. Their aimless actions become directed. Their arms and legs become the instruments of minds eager to know and to penetrate the reality of their environment. A search for knowledge now replaces their aimless curiosity. With a brilliant insight, psychoanalysts have described the abnormal development of the imagination and excessive interest in play as a 'psychic fugue.'" *Secret of Childhood*

The manipulation of the Montessori materials invites the child to utilize and build his powers of creativity and therefore his imaginative powers. Here he explores the environment and materials on new levels and according to the dictates of his inner self within the proper limits of the classroom. These materials provide for an incredible amount of imaginative expression and exploration. In fact, it is the work with the Montessori materials that reveals the normalized child. This child is grounded in reality and loves to work with real world objects and chooses to use "real-life" activities over the make-believe.

In the words of Montessori, "Imagination can have only a sensory basis." The sensory education which prepares for the accurate perception of the different details in the qualities of things, is therefore the foundation of the observation of things and of the phenomena which present themselves to our senses; and with this it helps us to collect from the external world the material for the imagination. Imaginative creation has no mere vague sensory support; that is to say, it is not the unbridled deviation of the fancy among images of light and color, sound and impressions; but it is a construction firmly allied to reality; and the more it holds fast to

the forms of the external created work..."Even in imagining an unreal and superhuman world the imagination must be contained within the limits which recall those of reality." *Maria Montessori Her Life and Work - EM Standing*

Montessori speaks of two types of deviations to reality in children. The first is the above mentioned "psychic fugue". She details that this type of deviation is easier to remedy in children since their ailment is centered in not having the right types of things for him to utilize. The prepared environment is his medicine.

The second type of deviation is more difficult to alter. "It is a phenomenon described by psychoanalysts as a 'psychic barrier.' A teacher should be able to identify such a problem. "A kind of veil descends upon a child's mind that renders it increasingly less responsive. Through this defensive mechanism the soul unconsciously says, 'You speak, but I do not listen. You keep repeating, but I do not hear you. I cannot build up my own world since I am too busy erecting a wall to keep you out.'" *The Secret of Childhood*

A prolonged defense of this kind causes a child to act as if he has lost the use of his natural faculties. There is no longer a question of good or bad will. In fact, teachers who are confronted with children afflicted with such psychic barriers believe that they are below average in intelligence and incapable of grasping certain types of material such as arithmetic and spelling.

She goes on to say that if these children continue in their building of these psychic barriers there can be a block created to any type of learning. These barriers are much harder to overcome in children, even young children.

It is my experience and observation over the years that so much depends on the guide, the directors of the school, and parents in determining how grounded in reality a child is and becomes. These very same people in the child's life are also those that can potentially create problems with barriers to learning. Much rests on the shoulders of adults. After the year begins, and the classroom has begun the process of regular work, it doesn't take long to recognize which children live up a barrier. It can be tricky to bring that barrier down. The guide must be tireless in watching for the thing that sparks the child's interest or turns his head. She must become more animated as she does her "own" work (that will usually have something to do with an interest of that child) near him, never letting on that she is presenting anything to him. She must truly show love for her work. This can take a very long time.

Sometimes a child with a psychic barrier never removes them.

What then are Montessori's views on imagination and creativity? Because the environment is a place of beauty, order and reality the child has the freedom to choose the things that call to him. He is free from the annihilating influence of an authority that would crush his creative impulse. "Montessori realized that the child needs freedom if he is to develop creativity - freedom to select what attracts him in his environment, to relate to it without interruption and for as long as he likes, to discover solutions and ideas and select answers on his own, and to communicate his discoveries with others as will... This is in direct contrast to the traditional school setting, where the basis for evaluation is always outside the child... Montessori deserves credit for

an early appreciation of the scope of creativity and for developing better means for encouraging it than had hitherto been devised." *Montessori - A Modern Approach - P Lillard*

The young child in the first plane of development is still in a place of concrete thinking. What they see must be. The 3 - 6 year old child does not have the ability to think abstractly enough to make a real distinction between the world of fantasy portrayed in movies and television and the real world around them. It is not until they enter the second plane of development that they can make the distinctions between fantastical or imaginary things and what is real. It is the 6 - 9 year old that can overcome these hurdles of early childhood using their new logical reasoning abilities.

The important question as to whether or not the Montessori classroom adequately and responsibly provides a climate conducive to imagination is very important. If a classroom is well stocked with beautiful materials, a child will first use the materials for their presented purpose, and then will begin creating imaginative extensions. Sometimes a guide will need to begin by showing the children that it is desirable to create something new. Through my own observations in Montessori classrooms over the past 12 years I have seen many, many classrooms that are rich in the traditional materials as well as other free ended materials and art materials that encourage the further development of imagination. The children in these classes have been so engaged with the real-life work around them that pretend play things are completely unnecessary. The children are happy, busy, learning and self-directed. The study of these concepts has brought clarity for me.

The conference would be organized jointly, with no single organization acting as host or sponsor or dominating the agenda. Neutrality is an important factor in this effort.

3rd - to create a task force to develop a position paper on teacher training (pre-service).

The next meeting will be in Alexandria in December.

Montessori's Words

Letter to All Governments

Part of a Letter Written in 1947 by Maria Montessori sent to all Governments

My life has been spent in the research of truth. Through study of children I have scrutinized human nature at its origin both in the East and the West, and although it is forty years now since I began my work, childhood still seems to me an inexhaustible source of revelations and – let me say – of hope.



Childhood has shown me that all humanity is one. All children talk, no matter what their race or their circumstances or their family, more or less at the same age; they walk, change their teeth, etc. at certain fixed periods of their life. In other aspects also, especially in the physical field, they are just as similar, just as susceptible.

Children are the constructors of men whom they build, taking from the environment language, religion, customs, and the peculiarities not only of the race, not only of the nation, but even of a special district in which they develop.

Childhood constructs with what it finds. If the material is poor, the construction is also poor. As far as civilization is concerned the child is at the level of the food-gatherers.

In order to build himself, he has to take by chance, whatever he finds in the environment.

The child is the forgotten citizen, and yet, if statesmen and educationalists once came to realize the terrific force that is in childhood for good or for evil, I feel they would give it priority above everything else.

All problems of humanity depend on man himself; if man is disregarded in his construction, the problem will never be solved.

No child is a Bolshevik or a Fascist or a Democrat; they all become what circumstances or the environment makes them.

In our days when in spite of the terrible lessons of two world wars, the times ahead loom as dark as ever before, I feel strongly that another field has to be explored, besides those of economics and ideology. It is the student of MAN – not of adult man on who every appeal is wasted. He, economically insecure, remains bewildered in the maelstrom of conflicting ideas and throws himself now on this side, now on that. Man must be cultivated from the beginning of life when the great powers of nature are at work. It is then that one can hope to plan for a better international understanding.

Maria Montessori



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