

A Mom's Montessori Moment

Shared by David Ayer

One of our Children's House parents recently shared this story with us, and gave me leave to share it:

Anna (5 1/2) and William (3 1/2) spent a week on my mom's farm and towards the end they were getting quite comfortable there. They asked if they could ride their bikes down to the barn and I said sure.

"You mean we can go by ourselves?" Anna asked, surprised.

I thought about it for a minute and about the importance of independence, and it felt like the right time to let them go off on their own. They were thrilled and looked over their shoulders at me as they rode away and waved.

Of course, not much time passed before I snuck through the woods to make sure they were safe. The scene when I arrived made me smile. I assumed the kids, when left to their own devices, would have been fooling around, but it was quite the contrary.

Anna was scaling the fence with a shovel, and William was right behind her. She lowered herself into one of the horse stalls and began to shovel manure. Since she didn't know how to open the gate, she carefully scaled the fence with each load and placed it in the wheelbarrow.

What was especially surprising to me about this is that we had never once discussed cleaning the barn with them. It was something my mom usually did while we were just hanging around. Then I was reminded of Montessori and the powers of observation and their teacher's reminder to me that the children's work never stops. For them, there is no division between the classroom and the world.

This was the beauty of Montessori unfolding before me. By the time I went to fetch my mother to take in this scene, the stalls were cleaned and the children were both busily sweeping the barn floor. Neither of us dared disturb their work and kept out of sight. When they were finished, there wasn't one straw of hay to be seen. We could have held a banquet there. The barn floor has never been so clean!

We scurried back to the house to greet Anna and William when they arrived. Not surprisingly, they didn't even mention what they had done. For them, the satisfaction had been in the work itself. They didn't return seeking any reward or praise, for they had already earned it from themselves back at the barn.

Even though their teacher was half a world away at the time, I couldn't help but feel that her gentle hand and the wisdom of her guiding were right there with us at the farm.

About David Ayer: David discovered Montessori through his daughter, Virginia, who attended Whole Child Montessori School, and his wife, Elise, who was teaching in the upper elementary at Montessori School of Beaverton. He earned his primary diploma at the Montessori Institute Northwest in 1995.

David taught at Vancouver Montessori School before starting the Montessori Adolescent Project Northwest with Elise. He continued his Montessori adolescent work at the Hershey Montessori Farm School and the Franciscan Montessori Earth School before joining Sunstone Montessori School as Assistant Director.

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What Should School Be For?

Written by Maren Schmidt

Highlights from Dr. Steven Hughes MINW Talk

Dr. Steven Hughes, a pediatric neuropsychologist at the University of Minnesota and a parent to an eleven-year old Montessori student, spoke to a full house on September 23, 2008 at the Oregon Health and Sciences Auditorium. In his talk, entitled Good at Doing Things: Montessori Education and the Higher-order Cognitive Functions, Hughes posed the question--What should school be for?

What Students Want

Hughes turned to the research of his associate and mentor, Dr. John Raven, to highlight the following ten outcomes that students wanted from school:

- To leave school confident and able to take initiative
- To be independent
- To develop character and personality strengths
- To hear about career and educational opportunities from experts
- To apply knowledge to solve problems
- To be able to express oneself effectively
- To be able to put forth ones' own opinion
- To know about different types of jobs and careers
- To be encouraged to express opinions
- To understand the implications and responsibilities of marriage

Teacher Wishes

What do teachers want to teach? Raven found the following desires among teachers:

- Help students develop their characters and personalities
- Encourage students to be independent
- Make sure students can read and study on their own
- Encourage students to have a sense of duty toward their community
- Ensure that all pupils can speak well and put what they want to say into words easily
- Encourage students to have opinions of their own
- Help student be considerate of others
- Help students contemplate what they really want to achieve in life
- Make sure students can express themselves clearly in writing
- Teach about what is right and wrong

The Reality

What gets taught? Raven's studies showed the following educational goals get the most attention:

- Help students do as well as they can on standardized tests
- Help them develop a considerate attitude toward other people
- Make sure they enjoy the lesson
- Encourage them to have opinions of their own
- Encourage them to have a sense of duty toward the community
- Make sure they are able to read and study on their own
- Teach them about what is right and wrong
- Ensure they can express themselves clearly in writing
- Ensure they can speak well and put what they want to say into words easily
- Encourage them to be independent and stand on their own two feet

Hughes commented that Raven's study has been duplicated all over the world with the same results, finding that teachers and students' desires, actions and outcomes are in conflict.

Montessori Approach Assists Students and Teachers

What makes Montessori education different? Hughes said that Montessori education allows the experimental interactions of a child with his or her environment. It is the experimental interaction with our environment that promotes healthy brain development. Experimental interaction gives a child the ability to achieve self-confidence, independence, the development of character and personality strengths, problem solving skills, self-expression, opinion formulation and more. The work in a Montessori classroom aligns the goals and outcomes of both students and teachers.

Good at Doing Things

Hughes discovered Montessori education when he asked his friend, Deborah Sussex, who had extensive experience working with older children and teens at Camp Widjiwagan in northern Minnesota, where the best kids in the area came from. Her answer was, "Lake Country Montessori School." Sussex said that the kids at the Montessori school could figure out what needed to be done, do it well, and embellish on the task.

Other adolescents, she said, had to be asked to do something more than once, reminded, and held accountable. But if you asked the students from Lake Country to set the table, they would do it, and embellish the work by adding flower arrangements. Montessori students, she found, were good at doing things. That was the difference.

Pediatric Neuropsychologist as Parent

Hughes learned more about Montessori education as he watched the process in action with his daughter. Observing his daughter he began to understand the power that Montessori education had on positive brain development. "Montessori education is the embodiment of all I learned in my

PhD in pediatric neuropsychology," Hughes told the audience. "It's like education designed by a gifted pediatric neuropsychologist."

Hughes commented that 75% of his peers in pediatric neuropsychology have children who attend or have attended Montessori schools. Neuropsychologists see that Montessori environments push the edge of learning for children, keeping the brain challenged, and thus growing. The child's hands-on experimental interactions within a Montessori environment aid optimal brain development. "What should schools be for?" Hughes asked again. They should be about building better brains."

Building Better Brains: A Montessori Strength

How do we build better brains in Montessori environments? Hughes said the strengths of a Montessori classroom included the child's opportunities for repetition of activities, the psychological safety and security of a classroom, the caring for living things, the multitude of activities that use the hand of the child to reinforce learning, the creation of a cycle of choosing, doing, and learning, the multi-sensory materials available, the child's self-guided learning, and the exploration of the out of doors.

Hughes explained how the brain is especially wired to accept sensory information from the hand and showed a humorous picture depicting brain development being dominated by input from the hand. The brain looked like it was all hands, bringing home the point that the hands-on learning that occurs in a Montessori classroom is perfect for children's brain development.

Hughes stated that all meaningful work needs error analysis, and that a strength of a Montessori classroom is that the child is free to make a mistake and learn from that failure. It is with the child's analysis of error that creates the development of executive function in the child. "Nothing is as good as Montessori education for the development of executive function," Hughes said.

The Process of Normalization Aids Executive Function

The prefrontal cortex in the brain controls executive function. The prefrontal cortex serves to help us link present to future, develop impulse control, and to modify events remote in time and space. It is this part of the brain that allows us to plan, imagine, organize, create self-awareness, self correct, choose strategies, and make critical judgments.

The child's work in a Montessori environment fosters the executive functions of the brain. The outward manifestations of the child's internal brain growth are shown in the child's observable behavior. Certain behaviors indicate that optimum development is occurring within the child, a process that Montessori called "normalization." Normalization is characterized by the young child's love of order, love of work or meaningful activity, love of silence and working alone, attachment to reality, spontaneous concentration, obedience, independence and initiative, and joy.

Children who exhibit these behaviors seen in normalization are also good at doing things. For those concerned about academic development more than

being good at doing things, Hughes provided some statistical information.

Montessori Research Shows Academic Achievement

Hughes cited Dr. Angeline Lillard's research at Craig Montessori in Milwaukee that showed that by the end of kindergarten Montessori students performed better than their peers at executive control, decoding language and early math, social awareness, and appeals to social justice. By sixth grade Montessori students outperformed their peers in social skills, exhibiting a sense of community, creativity in story writing, and complexity of sentence formulation.

The East Dallas Community School, a public Montessori started in 1978 in Dallas, Texas serving children from birth to third grade, had the following results:

- In 2002, 78 percent of third graders applied to go to gifted and talented programs and were accepted
- 99 percent of students obtained GED's or equivalent
- 88 percent went to college when only 50 percent of Dallas public school students go to college.

Montessori Culture, Methods and Materials are Singular Strengths

Hughes final point was that Montessori differs in contrast to other theories of education in that Montessori culture, method and materials are well established. Hughes gave the example of John Dewey's ideas. Dewey believed that students should be involved in real-life tasks and challenges, an idea that Montessori practitioners also endorse. Dewey's philosophy in comparison to Montessori education has not been enriched and developed by a vibrant learning culture supported by methods and materials.

Educational culture is the most important part of Montessori education as it contains a view of humanity that is transformational, and the core values of Montessori education create civilization.

Our Earth Needs People Who are Good at Doing Things

As Hughes showed a picture of our Earth from space, he said we must we realize that no one is going to come and save us. We are it.

Montessori education can help our children become people who can solve the problems of our planet, people who can look around, figure out what needs to be done, and do it.

Montessori kids are good at doing things. That's what Montessori schools are for. That's what our world needs.

Visit Steven Hughes' website, www.goodatdoingthings.com and Angeline Lillard's website, www.montessori-science.org. Dr. Raven's research is at www.johnraven.co.uk.

About Maren Schmidt: Maren Schmidt is an AMI trained elementary guide and currently writes the award winning newspaper columns, Kids Talk. Visit KidsTalkNews.com.

Maren is the author of two books, *Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents*, and *Building Cathedrals Not Walls*.

Maren currently serves on the OMA Board.

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OMA Visits With Daniel Pink

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us

Written by Joy Nauman and David Cannon

Daniel Pink visited Portland January 17 while on his book tour for his newly released *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. We scheduled an interview with him before his talk at Powell's and found him eager to relate his findings to the ways in which Montessori works with children. Obviously fascinated with learning "what makes people tick," Pink asked as many questions of us as we did of him.

Pink delivered the opening address at AMI's 2008 Refresher Course in Atlanta after publishing the book, *A Whole New Mind*. While researching his thesis for *A Whole New Mind*, Pink discovered that Montessori pedagogy is particularly well suited for the needs of children. His thesis that the world today needs people who think in fundamentally different ways led him to discover that Montessori was particularly well suited to the learning needs of the present and future world.

Drive is Pink's take on what has been discovered in recent decades about motivation. Pink has concluded that what most effectively fosters enduring motivation is that which leads an individual to feel any of these three things: Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose.

Pink cites a variety of studies that lead to this conclusion, and describes several successful business corporations using innovative managerial methods that are consistent with this enlightened theory of motivation. Pink contrasts the results of a traditional reward and punishment approach to motivation, which he calls Motivation 2.0, to those achieved by a style that promotes autonomy, mastery, and purpose, which he labels Motivation 3.0.

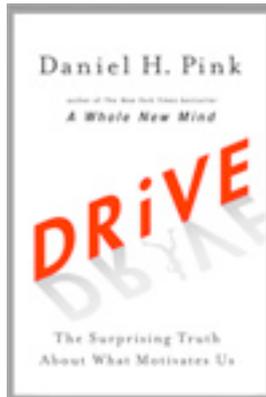
"Rewards and punishments do work well in a narrow band of circumstances," Pink acknowledged, "but even then they produce a cascade of collateral damages. Many experiments have shown, for example, that the use of rewards tends to extinguish the desired behaviors, especially those that are creative or complex."

Pink is not arguing that "carrots and sticks" should be abandoned altogether. He makes a point, for example, that financial compensation necessarily plays a role in workplace motivation. It's simply been given too much emphasis in relation to other factors necessary to bring out the best in people.

Drive focuses largely on adults and the world of work, although it does include a chapter on education. Pink was more than happy to talk with us about children and the educational system, which, he believes, continues to rely largely on assumptions about motivation that have been shown to be false and fail to prepare young people for the kinds of lives and careers that will serve them and society well. In his chapter on education, Pink describes several educational systems that support these ideas on motivation, including a paragraph on Montessori education.

"The vast majority of Montessorians know exactly what I'm talking about in this book. You practice what I call 'big-picture' learning. You understand that children, like adults, are engaged in their most meaningful learning when they achieve what has been called 'flow.' This is not only a deeply satisfying state of mind, but it is powerfully motivating of future efforts." Pink noted that what Montessori education offers children is the chance to work and learn in a manner that often produces this state of mind because Montessori classrooms focus on the individual's sense of autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

Daniel Pink told us he hopes his new book will be a useful tool for Montessorians and others who are working to bring understanding about this fundamental and important issue of motivation.



About the Authors:

Joy Nauman and David Cannon are Montessorians who currently serve on the OMA Board of Directors.

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Mark Your Calendar for a Very Special Event!

By David Cannon, Cathy Dorner and Laura Pilkington

Do you have a 2013 calendar yet? Probably not, but these dates will make the effort of finding one worth it!

On **July 31 – August 3, 2013** the **27th International Montessori Congress, “Guided by Nature,”** will be hosted right here in Portland, Oregon! This is the first International Montessori Congress in the USA in more than 40 years.

Why Portland, you ask?

As a result of the efforts of a volunteer Steering Committee, and staff at the Montessori Institute Northwest (MINW), the *Association Montessori Internationale* (AMI) has designated Portland as the site of this event! Due to the difficulty encountered in setting up a separate 501(c)3 for the Congress, MINW will house the organization of the Congress, but the Congress itself will be run and organized by volunteers, Montessorians and non-Montessorians alike, from all over Oregon, the United States, and the world.

During his visit to Portland this past March, AMI’s President, André Roberfroid, informed our community that this International Congress is *not* primarily an AMI event, but an event for the entire Montessori world, and more. Roberfroid emphasized that this is “not a conference, not a refresher course, not a lineup of speakers,” but something to be experienced with the senses and the emotions as well as the mind. Montessori organizations of all types, and other groups with positive agendas to advance the cause of the child, will be invited to participate in the planning and execution of the Congress. A Congress done well will be transformative for the Montessori movement, as well as the community who hosts it.

On March 15, 2010 Megan Tyne of AMI gave a presentation at MINW about her experience organizing the International Congress in Sydney, Australia and she also provided an historical perspective about Congresses in general. Since many of us in the Montessori community have never been to a Congress and may not know much about them, the following is a brief summary of Megan’s informative presentation.

Since the first Congress in 1929, in Helsingør, Denmark, the Association Montessori Internationale, (founded at that event by Maria Montessori), has offered 26 subsequent Congresses around the world, with one being held approximately every four years. Congresses provide an open venue for the worldwide Montessori community and their prime purpose is to raise awareness and understanding of the principles and practice of Montessori education and to provide inspiration to all who come. Participants in Congresses have an

opportunity to exchange ideas and reflect on the global implications of Montessori. Congresses are open to all Montessori practices, parents, and anyone interested in the Montessori movement.

Each Congress is, by design, intended to cause movement and action in the international community; evoking the constant evolution of the Montessori movement by building on the intentions and accomplishments of the preceding Congress. Themes from past Congresses include: Reflective Practice and Spontaneous Living; Champion the Cause of All Children; Education as an Aid to Life; and Maria Montessori: Explicit and Implicit in the 20th Century. Those attending the March meeting at MINW viewed slides of the 2005 Congress, hosted in Sydney, Australia, and the 2009 Congress, hosted in Chanai, India. Attendees saw music performances, children singing, national and international exhibits, field trips, and a lot of celebration. When you come to the 2013 Congress, be sure to bring your dancing shoes!

Because it is estimated that there will be at least 1300 participants for the conference at the Oregon Convention Center over the four-day course of the 2013 Congress, it is clear that the Congress will require not dozens of volunteers, but hundreds. In addition to having conference room and dining space reserved at the Convention Center for the actual Congress exhibits, a hotel block is being reserved at the downtown Hilton and Executive Tower for Congress attendees to stay at while in Portland. These reservations have been made possible by a grant from Travel Portland.

The Congress will be a great opportunity to show the world some of the wonders of our beautiful Pacific Northwest region. It is quite an honor for our city, state and region to host this major international event. **YOU** are needed and wanted to make this a successful event. Until there is a separate email account for the Congress, please email Jennifer Davidson (jennifer@montessori-nw.org) with your interest! Once the organizational structure of the Congress becomes a bit more solidified, you will be contacted with more detailed information about your important role in making the Congress a success.

The OMA Board hopes that all our members will take an active role in the development of the Congress over the years, months and weeks to come. In the meantime, mark your calendar, **July 31 – August 3, 2013, International Montessori Congress, “Guided by Nature,”** and be thinking about how you’d like to become involved!

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The Importance of Self-Regulation in Early Childhood

By David Ayer

On April 21, 2010, the Montessori Institute Northwest hosted Dr. Kathleen Lloyd, a Montessori teacher with 18 years of classroom experience who is now the assistant director of the Center for Teaching and Learning of Oregon State University. Dr. Lloyd spoke on current research which supports Montessori educational philosophy, and what follows is a summary, however imperfect, of her inspiring and moving presentation.

Maria Montessori spoke and wrote passionately during her lifetime about the role of education in bringing about world peace: *“Preventing war is the work of politicians. Bringing about peace is the work of education.”* She regarded the development of the will, and the ability to make good choices, as a crucial element of this work. Dr. Lloyd had been a passionate advocate for children and Montessori for many years when she began to ask herself why we seem to be still so far from that goal after so many years. When she decided to enter the academic world of Human Development and Family Science, she began to ask how the will could be studied in that context. “The will?” she was told, “How can you measure that? Maybe you should ask the Philosophy department.”

But philosophy was not where she felt the work needed to be done, and certainly not the department where educational research and policy development took place. On further investigation, she found a psychological concept that seemed to relate to the same idea: that of *self-regulation*.

In the world of developmental psychology, self-regulation has been major field of study in the area of early childhood education for about 30 years. It brings together the ideas of executive function, impulse or ego control, and attention. Mary Rothbart and Michael Posner at the University of Oregon define self-regulation like this:

- the ability to control reactions to stress
- the capacity to maintain and focus attention
- the capacity to recognize and interpret the emotional states of others

Psychological research indicates that this capacity begins to develop in infancy and has its greatest growth during the pre-school years. (Readers familiar with Montessori will recognize some parallel elements to our work with children already.) Self-regulation is linked to nearly every human success or failure, and low self-regulation correlates with most negative outcomes, including drug addiction, criminal activity, relationship challenges, and much more. It is seen as essential to co-operation and peace.

The human development literature presents a received and accepted view of activity that supports the growth of self-regulation. Foremost are caring, loving, supportive relationships with children. We know that nothing can move develop well without respect, rapport, and connection. In addition, children have been shown to develop self-regulation through conflict and negotiation, especially successfully mediated and resolved conflict. Montessori does well in both of these areas, with its mixed-age classrooms which provide time for the development of relationships, and with its emphasis on conflict resolution within the classroom. ‘Play-based’ programs are also well-supported by educational research, and Montessori’s de-emphasis on dramatic play is one reason we are not well-represented in the academic mainstream.

New research is emerging, however, which adds to this picture. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (or fMRI) suggests that self-regulation is a complex behavioral system in the brain that can be activated through interaction with the environment. Further, a specific type of interaction and activity seems to activate this system. This activity is known as *effortful control*, which is itself a behavioral system which allows for voluntary control of emotions and behavior.



Five-year-old doing four digit addition with stamp game.

Effortful control itself is a new addition to the Rothbart and Derryberry’s model of temperament. Temperament is considered a framework that underlies human personality, and is thought to be biologically or neurologically bases and to some extent hereditary. Temperamental traits are thought to be fairly stable, although subject to some influence from environment. The effortful control trait is defined as “voluntary control versus automatic or recursive behavior,” or the ability to activate behaviors when necessary—even when you don’t want to.

Obviously, children are not always capable of activating or inhibiting behavior, even when it is in their own self-interest to do so. However, the development of this ability follows a well-established trajectory. Under 22 months of age, it is described as ‘modestly coherent.’ By 33 months, it is typically highly coherent; by 45 months it is stable, and robust differences can be seen between individuals; and by four years, it is stable over time and comparable to IQ.

A strong effortful control system brings many benefits. It has been shown to be protective against a range of behavioral disorders. Effortful control is associated with lower levels of psychopathology and maladjustment, with the development of empathy, and with less delinquent behavior, aggression, and depression in young adolescents. Effortful control is seen in this model as a key component of self-regulation, and low self-regulation is associated with a host of behavior problems.

So what can we do to support this aspect of temperament? It turns out that this aspect is supported by yet another behavioral system, the *executive attention network*. This is a system in the brain responsible for attention, focus, and decision-making, which experiences considerable development both naturally and in response to the environment between the ages of two and seven. In addition, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's research into *optimal experience theory*, popularized as *flow* in his book with that title, also relates to effortful control and hence self-regulation. Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' state occurs when a subject is working at a high level of skill offering a high level of challenge, so control, focus, and the executive functioning systems of the brain are all called upon to function at their highest levels. The ability to sustain attention, as in the 'flow' state, supports self-regulation throughout the entire human lifespan. These findings spurred one researcher to suggest, a systematic training of attention might be an important addition to preschool education.

How does this all relate to Montessori? As part of her research, Dr. Lloyd conducted extensive interviews with AMI Montessori teacher trainers, the professionals with the fullest and most representative understanding of the Montessori approach. Without being prompted with terms from Lloyd's human development research, the trainers' description of the development of the first-plane child, and in particular the concept of *normalization*, resonated strongly with the research findings.



Five-year-old focusing on trinomial cube.

Research has indicated that children have an innate potential for effortful control, and hence self-regulation, as part of their temperament. Temperament is inborn, yet plastic in response to environment. Dr. Montessori observed that when the environment is appropriately prepared, a form of self-regulation spontaneously emerges which she termed *normalization*. According to the trainers,

Normalization is an observable phenomenon which occurs after children are given freedom to follow their interests, using their hands and minds to engage in purposeful work that results in an experience of deep mental concentration.

The conditions that promote normalization, according to Montessori, are opportunities for concentration, opportunities for purposeful work which is integrated into the life of the community, freely chosen activities, and activities with a good balance between challenge and skill. It's easy to see how this lines up with the executive attention network, effortful control, and optimal experience theory (flow). The hallmarks of normalization included concentration, a love of work, spontaneous self-discipline, and a refined sense of sociability and expressions of kindness. Again, this seems to match up fairly well with the correlation between self-regulation and positive behavioral outcomes.

It's not surprising to many of us in Montessori work to find her observations borne out by research—we see these effects in children every day. But it is critical to the expansion of Montessori *beyond* our own world to continue to tie her observations to concrete, reproducible, and theoretically grounded results. In addition, Montessori's unique contribution, once again decades ahead of her time, is the idea that the prepared environment itself can have such a profound influence on development. As we see the importance of the environment become a factor in conventional research, this could become yet another area in which the connections to Montessori are strengthened.

About David Ayer: David discovered Montessori through his daughter, Virginia, who attended Whole Child Montessori School, and his wife, Elise, who was teaching in the upper elementary at Montessori School of Beaverton. He earned his primary diploma at the Montessori Institute Northwest in 1995. David taught at Vancouver Montessori School before starting the Montessori Adolescent Project Northwest with Elise. He continued his Montessori adolescent work at the Hershey Montessori Farm School and the Franciscan Montessori Earth School before joining Sunstone Montessori School as Assistant Director.

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Together

By Maren Schmidt

In my chiropractor's examining room, there is a poster of two hands reaching for a handshake with the title "Together". The poster says:

OUR JOB

- See you as an individual
- Respect your privacy and your time
- Provide a comfortable office
- Explain procedures
- Monitor and report progress
- Show you ways to get and stay well
- Offer state of the art chiropractic
- Refer to specialists if needed
- Charge a fair fee for our services
- Honor individual health goals

YOUR JOB

- Want better health
- Get involved
- Keep appointments
- Follow advice
- Ask questions
- Seek answers
- Expect results
- Stay optimistic
- Pay your bill
- Tell others

For me this poster clearly communicates the roles of doctor and patient. Upon further reflection, I see that this message is valid for any professional relationship or organization. An organization, as Stephen Covey defines it, is any group of two or more people working for a common goal.

Excited about how this poster states clear roles and expectations, I revised it to reflect the relationships between school and home, or teacher and parents.

OUR JOB

- See you and your child as individuals
- Respect your privacy and your time
- Provide comfortable facilities
- Explain procedures
- Monitor and report your child's progress
- Show you ways to aid your child's development
- Offer state of the art education
- Refer to specialists if needed
- Charge a fair fee for our services
- Honor individual educational needs

YOUR JOB

Want a better school community for all
Get involved
Be on time
Follow advice
Ask questions
Seek answers
Expect results
Stay optimistic
Pay your tuition and/or taxes
Tell others

Having played many roles in education—student, teacher, parent, school administrator, principal, school owner, tuition check writer and taxpayer—I realize that when I missed one of the jobs on this list, problems followed. When someone didn't do their part within the organization, trust and satisfaction in the relationship were damaged or destroyed.

In the roles we play in our educational organizations, as either service providers or consumers, let's encourage the development of clear and concise expectations for the tasks that need to be addressed to assure our group's success.

Our Job. Your Job. It's easy to look at these lists and for everyone to know if expectations are being met. When there are rough spots in a relationship, (remember, if we're human there will be problems) each party can look at the lists to help define the problem, discern contributing factors to the situation, and create possible solutions.

Roles and expectations clearly stated from the beginning can help us make our organizations successful for all our students, our families, our school staff and our communities.

A successful doctor needs cooperative patients. Patients need an understanding doctor. Successful schools need collaborative families. Families need effective schools. Together, we can do it.

About Maren Schmidt: Maren founded a Montessori school and holds a Masters of Education from Loyola college in Maryland. She has over twenty-five years experience working with children. Maren writes the weekly syndicated newspaper column, Kids Talk. She is author of two books, *Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents* and *Building Cathedrals Not Walls*. Maren currently serves as an OMA board member.

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Creativity—What's That?

By Mark Berger

Montessori education is the only approach to education that is preparing children for today's world, tomorrow's world and beyond. The only one. Fully and completely. That's a powerful statement and message. Recently there was a media story, in *Harvard Business Review*, no less, that referenced **Montessori education as a source of innovative creators and entrepreneurs** (HRB online, editor's blog, Sept. 28, 2009; with a full article to appear in the December 2009 issue of HBR). This is not the only statement out there of its kind.....

In his book, *A Whole New Mind* (Riverhead Books, 2005), Dan Pink argued for a new approach to thinking and education. He argued that the "old" way of thinking – linear, analytical – was fine and did wonderful things for advancing civilization, but if we want to move forward we'll need a "whole new mind", one that integrates the strengths of the right hemisphere: seeing the big picture, sensitive to esthetics, etc. with those of the left hemisphere. This new mind will **unleash humanity's true creativity**, he argues, and help people solve the problems that will need to be solved.

Pink has convincing arguments for why this matters. He considers the fact that the "global economy" is not part of the future, but is here today. He considers the impact that this is having on how we live and work. He considers the shifting job prospects for people in various parts of the globe. One of his overall points is that people will need to have far **greater adaptability and be more fundamentally creative** with their lives; people will experience greater career shifts and more often. An "education" should prepare people for that. **Montessori schools do just this.....** Our environments create children who see the world as an integrated place. They function with a truly creative mind because they have been steeped in an approach that asks them, requires them even, to consider more than what's just in front of them.

This kind of innovative thinking has already begun to shape our culture, and the Montessori children who are behind much of this innovation are talking about it. **"I want people to feel creative** and involved and feel like they're doing something constructive. **Montessori is a great tool for that purpose**, says Will Wright (*Kotaku* online magazine, March 2009), creator of the *Spore* computer game/toy as well as the *Sims* series. He also said "Maria Montessori thought that it was very valuable for kids to discover things on their own rather than bring taught things overtly..." and he relates this to the ability to fail and to generate new ideas and approaches, much as he has with his inventive toys, as he calls them. (TED talk, March 2007, Monterey, CA).

Today we have more. Today we can show the results. We must present not only the facts of Montessori children becoming innovative thinkers and creators, but show **how it is that Montessori does this**. The supportive work of Dr. Steven Hughes (www.goodatdoingthings.com) in this area is an indication of how this

can be done. His “Good at Doing Things” presentation makes clear how and why it is that Montessori children *are* good at doing things.

Mark Berger is currently head of school at Corvallis Montessori School in Oregon. This article was taken from the Corvallis Montessori School’s blog at www.corvallismontessori.org/blog/

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Preparing the Environment

From Susan Mayclin Stephenson

Michael Olaf Montessori

***Many children in the USA have too many toys!
So what do we get for them for the holidays?***

Children want, children need, their parents time and attention. Recently there have been many 1-minute bedtime story type books on the market; what is that message to families? And toys that are advertised for children to use all by themselves alone in their room, fantasy toys where children can create a perfect world where there are many people who share their daily lives! Or electronic items where they learn to turn to a machine instead of other humans for happiness. Or plastic toys that give the message that children are not worth the real thing or the best quality. Where is this heading?

Each year the Michael Olaf Montessori Company has reduced the number of items they carry for children, focusing on better and better quality items that families can use together, or that teach about the real world of plants, animals and humans, and the beautiful world of the arts.

The following text is adapted from the Michael Olaf publications, Please feel free to share anything on this page with friends, teachers, family, anyone who wants the very best for the next generation.

Preparing the Environment

Constant preparation and adaptation of the environment to the ever-changing needs and tendencies of growing children is essential in the Montessori method of raising and educating children. The first consideration is physical safety, and then the proper support for free movement, exploration, making choices, concentrating, creating, completing cycles—all of which contribute to the optimum development of the child.

Natural materials instead of plastic, and attention to simplicity, muted colors, beauty, all contribute to the mental and physical health and self-respect of the child.

Reflecting the Child's Culture and Introducing the World

It is important that the environment reflect the child's heritage but also introduce the world. Look for items that are made by local artisans, or make them with your children, explore ethnic neighborhoods.

Make your home a unique reflection of your own unique part of the world. Include music, books, foods, crafts, stories from your parents and grandparents lives, but also include the same elements of cultures from around the world so your child learns that everyone is connected and he is a member of an international community.

Birth to Three

When parents are getting ready for the first child, they will be overwhelmed by ads on what they "need" for that child. It seems that these ads are aimed at selling things far more than providing what is really good for the child. Many items are not only over stimulating for the young child (too many objects, uncomfortably bright colors) but they hamper the natural development of important abilities such as language (pacifiers) and movement (cribs, swings, and high chairs) and even sometimes can be dangerous (walkers and off-gasses from plastic).

A simple, natural, and gentle environment, that encourages feelings of safety, and encourages the child to communicate with others and to move—that is the superior environment for the child from birth to three..

Safety

A child will develop more fully—mentally, emotionally, and physically—when she is free to move and explore an ever-enlarging environment. But in order to give the child this wonderful freedom, we must explore the home or day care environment with a fine-tooth comb. When a child is free to leave his floor bed and to move about his room, and later the other rooms—careful attention must be paid to covering plugs, taping wires to the wall or floor, removing poisonous plants and chemicals, and removing any objects that could harm the child. As the child begins to crawl quickly and to walk, the adults must continue to childproof the house.

General Environment Principles

Here are some things to keep in mind when organizing a child's environment.

(1) **Participation in Family Life:** Even from the very first days invite the child into the life of the family. In each room—the bedroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, front hall, and so forth.

(2) **Independence:** The child's message to us at any age is "Help me to do it myself." Supporting this need shows respect for and faith in the child. Think carefully about family activities in all areas of the home, and arrange each space to support independence. A coat tree, or low clothing rod or hook wherever the child dresses or undresses (front hall, bathroom, bedroom, etc.); a stool or bench for removing shoes and boots; inviting shelves for books, dishes, toys.

(3) **Belongings:** This brings up a very important point. It is too much for anyone to care for or enjoy belongings when there are too many out at one time. In preparing the home environment for a child, have a place to keep clothing, toys, and books that are not being used.

(4) **Putting Away & The Sense of Order:** "Discipline" comes from the same word as "disciple" and our children become disciplined only by imitating us; just as we teach manners such as saying "thank you" by modeling this for our children instead of reminding, we can teach them to put away their books and toys only by gracefully and cheerfully doing it over and over in their presence. People are always amazed at how neat and beautiful a child's environment can be with the right guidance.

The Environment & The Absorbent Mind

During the first years the child will absorb, like a sponge, whatever is in the environment, ugliness or beauty, coarse behavior or gentleness, good or bad language. As parents we are the first models of what it means to be human. If our children are in a childcare setting or an infant community we must exact the same high standards.

Quality and beauty of the environment and of books and materials are very important in attracting, satisfying, and keeping the attention of the child. If the child is exposed to beautiful mobiles, posters, rattles and toys, made of wood and other natural products, as an adult she will help create a world with the same high standards.

Toys, rattles, puzzles, tables, and chairs—made of wood—develop an appreciation for nature and quality and protect the child from unsafe chemicals that are found in many synthetic materials.

Pictures on the wall, hung at the eye-level of the child, can be beautiful, framed art prints, or simple posters. All of us have been influenced by our first environment, and nothing helps create beauty in the world as much as giving beauty to the very young.

Toy Storage

Rather than tossing toys into large toy boxes, it is more satisfying to the child to keep them neatly on shelves, hung on hooks, kept ready to work with on wooden

trays or small baskets. This also makes putting away much more logical and enjoyable. The Chinese art of placement, Feng Shui, teaches that clutter, even hidden under a bed or piled on the top of bookcases, can cause stress.

The Outside Environment

Sometimes we forget that daily life was first carried out in the outdoors, people coming into their homes for shelter from the elements. This is still the instinct of the child. In the first days of life, just a breath of fresh air and a look at the tree branches moving in the wind each day is sufficient; soon a daily walk in the baby carrier or stroller; and before you know it, walks led by the child, where each new thing—cracks in the sidewalk, parades of ants, puddles, brick walls, weeds and thistles—many details which we as adults previously overlooked, will enchant the child and make a short walk into a long drawn out discovery. Sometimes a "walk to the park" can take an hour, and one may not even get past the front sidewalk.

It is very good for us adults to slow down, forget our plan, and follow the child as he discovers, smells, sees, hears, and touches the outside world.

Welcome the child to your outside work—washing the car, working in the garden, whatever you can do outside instead of inside—there is always some little part of the real work that a child can do.

Try to create an outside area where the child can not only do outside activities such as playing in a sandbox, but activities he would be doing inside, such as washing his hands or the dishes, looking at books, doing a puzzle.

Age 3-6

Children at this age often prefer to work on the floor instead of at a table—on rugs or pieces of carpet that can be rolled up or put out of the way when not in use. This marks the workspace just as would a table.

Toys, books, and materials can be attractively arranged on trays and in baskets, on natural wood or white shelves according to subject—language, math, geography, history, science, music, and art. Each object has a special, permanent place so that children know where to find it and where to put it away for the next person when finished. Tables and chairs that support proper posture are important at every age.

Age 6-12

This child is interested in right and wrong, in the far distance past, cultures, countries, great people, exploring with the mind. He wants to explore with his mind and now has the imagination to do so. Give him books and projects, coop games, real work in the real world. He is building the groundwork for a valuable, interesting and enjoyable future.

He needs space for silence and uninterrupted time to think great thoughts. Whereas at age 3-6 the world was brought into the house of children, now the child begins to go out into the world, for field trips such as shopping at the grocery store for a cooking project, getting office supplies, interviewing subjects for history projects, or visiting museums, and so forth.

The Environment for All Children.

There are two important things to keep in mind in organizing a child's environment in the home.

(1) Have a place in each room for the few, carefully chosen child's belongings: By the front door a stool to sit on and a place to hang coats and keep shoes. In the living room a place for the child's books and toys—neatly, attractively organized. Think out the activities and the materials for all living spaces and arrange the environment to include the child's activities.

(2) Don't put out too many toys and books at one time. Those being used by the child at the moment are sufficient. It is a good idea to rotate—taking out those books and toys that have not been chosen lately and removing them to storage for a time. Children grow and change and they need help to keep their environment uncluttered and peaceful.

The Environment & the Mind

Everyone at every age is affected by their environment. Habits of organizing the environment reduce stress and aid the development of an organized, efficient, and creative mind.

A child who joins in the arrangement of an environment, and learns to select a few lovely things, will be aided in many ways with this help in creating good work habits, concentration, and a clear, uncluttered, and peaceful mind.

This article provided by Michael Olaf Montessori www.michaelolaf.net

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Helping Children to Help Themselves - Dressing and Undressing by Mercedes Paine Castle

Supporting your child's independence in dressing and undressing at home can make a difference in how successful they are in such activities at school. An inconsistent expectation between home and school might create disharmony. If we are asking a child to do something that they have limited experience with at home, this may be frustrating, and this learning process may take longer. When parents and teachers work together in service of the child, we can limit these frustrations and misunderstandings.

At school, the teachers start breaking down the steps to pushing off pants, removing diapers, and sitting on the toilet from infancy. Our expectation of the child changes as they grow and mature, and we are always observing each child for their signs of readiness for the next level of difficulty. Together, we work towards a goal that elicits a maximum effort, gained through cooperation and effort towards a new or higher skill level. In our experience, children under two years of age are successful in taking off and putting on their shoes and clothing. Regardless of age, the teachers approach dressing and undressing as a practical life skill, and encourage children to be as independent as possible in these endeavors.

At All Roads we support each child in their unique place of their own development. Important growth and development happens when children negotiate and overcome challenges. The feeling of accomplishment that one gets when a challenge is overcome is the reinforcer and the independence that the child achieves is their reward for successfully negotiating a problem or acquiring a new skill.

This feeling of accomplishment is what encourages perseverance in the face of difficulty. These relatively small accomplishments of basic skills reward the curious, encourage problem solving as transformative play, and they form the solid foundation on which a healthy sense of self is built. They will become the kind of person who challenges themselves in learning new skills and exploring new cultures throughout their life. They will try even when they are not positive that they will succeed. They will be carried forward by their intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation will authentically motivate an individual to successfully negotiate the world around them.

We focus on encouragement as opposed to praise at All Roads. When we encourage the children their intrinsic motivation is supported through thoughtful words and caring gestures. When supporting this idea of intrinsic motivation we recognize that feedback that places value on the teacher's approval or disapproval is counterproductive. Instead of saying "Good job" we might instead say "Wow, you worked really hard and you got those pants on all by yourself! Now you are ready to go play outside." or maybe "Was that 'I can' or 'I can't'?" or "Who put those pants on? You did! All by yourself!"

Along with encouragement we are sure to give them the time that they need to negotiate the task at hand. When we do things for the child that they are capable of doing on their

own we rob them of the experiences that they need to grow. Specifically, we take away opportunities for them to negotiate their own needs and practice being independent. Becoming proficient at dressing is a process, and children need lots of practice in order to get better at it. The more practice the better. Many young children are drawn to their cubbies and the bathroom driven by their own unconscious desire to understand and become proficient in this process.

Here are some ways that you can support your child in dressing and undressing at home:

– **Place your child's clothing in a place that they can easily access.** Jackets and rain pants on low hooks in an appropriate area for them to change. Daily clothes in a dresser or low shelf that can be easily accessed and operated. If they pull all their clothes out they have just created an excellent opportunity to learn how to put their clothes away. Remove any weather inappropriate clothing. Bringing parent and teacher expectations into harmony serves the child in their growth and development.

– **Supply your child with clothing that can be operated successfully.** Buttons, zippers and snaps are difficult but not impossible. Practice at home until your child is familiar with the challenge presented before you bring those jeans to school. When your child can operate their overalls successfully at home all by themselves they are ready to come to school in them.

– **Eliminate stretchy type pants from your girl's wardrobe.** Sweat pants with bunched ankles, stretch pants with narrow openings are frustrating for both the children and a teacher. Feet often get stuck going through. Make sure that the foot hole is wide enough for a foot to go into and out of easily.

– **Lay out clothing for school the next day the night before to avoid morning conflict.** Involve your child in choosing their clothes for the next day and even laying them out. The more children are a part of the processes governing their lives the more they will want to participate in those processes.

– **Allow time in the morning for your child to take the time that they need to be independent in dressing.** This can be quite difficult but everyone will have a happier morning if you can schedule enough time. No one likes to be rushed. It can feel extremely frustrating to a child that is trying to accomplish a task.

– **When dressing, establish an order in which clothes go on and stick to it.** Try to include your child in setting the order even let them take the lead. This order helps reinforce the routine, and brings comfort when familiar. Once it's been established don't change it arbitrarily – shifts happen gradually over time, honor these by observing and respond confidently once a new strategy is planned and discussed.

– **Isolate the difficulty in taking off each item of clothing.** When removing a shirt, show your child how to pinch the end of the sleeve and pull their arms out one arm at a time. Then let them push their shirt up over their head themselves.

– **Isolate the difficulty in putting on each item of clothing.** When putting on a shirt, start by stretching the neck hole a bit and place it just over your child's head. Let them pull the shirt down themselves. Hold the shirt at the bottom, so that the arm holes are easily accessible.

– **Push pants off at the waistband.** We don't really pull pants down, rather they are pushed. Tuck a finger in your child's waistband and say “ Push here, can you feel my hand? “

– **Lay pants out on the floor.** Show your child the waistband, and the tag goes in the back. Crouch behind your child, pinch the waistband so that they can see the opening. If they get both legs in one hole, let that happen. When your child notices, you can say “I see you have both legs in one hole, let's try again.”

– **If your child gets stuck, acknowledge their feelings. If they ask for help, say “What part do you need help with?”** Something that I say is “I am helping you with my words.” Sometimes, all it takes is you putting your hand on their clothing to move forward. You might say “Can you feel my hand at your waistband?”

– **Enjoy this time with your child.** Use laughter and tickles to diffuse tension. Caregiving routines are esteem building moments truly they are moments when we connect and grow together.

You can support your child at school in dressing and undressing by making sure that their clothing is weather appropriate, media free (except for underpants), and hold the promise of successful independent operation. The best type of pants have an elastic waistband and wide leg holes. The best shirts have a large neck opening, free of snaps and buttons, and are loose enough to operate independently. Slip on or velcro fastened shoes are ideal. Clothing and shoes should fit properly.

With parents and teachers working together to bring our expectations of the child into harmony, we serve the child in their growth and development. We support the child in learning how to dress and undress. When we liberate the child from their dependence on adults for these self-care routines, we free them to experience a deeper sense of connection with the adults in their lives and a sense of accomplishment that they carry with them on their life journey.

Mercedes Paine Castle founded All Roads Learning Community in 2003, and has since been guiding infants and toddlers towards independence.

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