

OREGON MONTESSORI ASSOCIATION

Forza Vitale!

SPECIAL ISSUE / 2021

ABOUT OUR SPECIAL AWARD

INTERVIEWS WITH THE WINNERS

20/21 REFLECTIONS

OUR SPONSORS



from the board

Hello Montessorians!

What a year this has been! We don't even need to use the words "challenging" or "unprecedented" anymore. There is a shared understanding of the complexity of this pandemic in the hearts and minds of everyone on this planet, and yet, here we are, with a Special Edition of the Forza to celebrate some pretty impressive educators.

Although a lot of work and mental flexibility was required, it was our joy and our pleasure to serve the Montessori community during this time. From March 2020 to date, the team at the Oregon Montessori Association has attended 564 meetings on behalf of the Montessori Community, clocked over 1750 hours of volunteer work for different projects, and created multiple ad-hoc workgroups, initiatives and solutions

designed to support schools, teachers and students. From a PPP Loan workgroup to a Distance Learning Model for Montessori Elementary Education, and from Social Justice and ABAR trainings to the MOCA Affinity group, we have tried our best to be there for every member of our community.

We hope you enjoy this special issue as much as we have enjoyed getting to know these amazingly dedicated educators and the many creative methods they used to go above and beyond what was expected of them.

In Unity & Wellness,

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
OREGON MONTESSORI ASSOCIATION



Outstanding Dedication

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IN THIS ISSUE

ABOUT THIS SPECIAL AWARD
p. 5

INFANT & TODDLER CATEGORY
p. 6

PRIMARY CATEGORY
p.9

**ELEMENTARY & ADOLESCENCE
CATEGORY**
p.13

SCHOOL TEAM CATEGORY
p.17

CELEBRATING ALL NOMINEES
p. 18

OUR SPONSORS
p. 28

Outstanding Dedication to Montessori Education Award 2020/21



About this Special Award

For the last 28 years our organization has been giving awards to selected members of the community in two categories: *Outstanding Dedication Award* for inspiring advocacy on behalf of Montessori education, and the *Susie Huston Award* for excellence and inspiration in teaching.

Our Board of Directors felt that this year called for something different. That is why we created the **Outstanding Dedication to Montessori Education Awards**, designed to elevate and celebrate the work of Montessori educators who demonstrated excellence and inspiration in their teaching, and with their communities. We added categories and drastically changed the way the winners are chosen.

The first three categories, **Infant & Toddler**, **Primary** and **Elementary & Adolescence**, were designed to highlight the work of individual teachers. We looked for Guides with a deep understanding of the Montessori method, who had the passion to transform their role within their schools, and who made remarkable efforts to connect with their students regardless of the dramatic changes in the prepared environment during the pandemic.

For the first time, parents and students could nominate teachers, as well as coworkers and other

educators, as has traditionally been done. It was a huge success!

After confirming eligibility, and from a total of 54 anonymized nominations, two panels of independent judges identified the top three contenders for each of the categories available. In a subsequent round, the lead judges from each panel met virtually to discuss the results, debate the final decisions and choose the winners. It was a long process, handled with careful consideration and meticulousity.

Additionally, the Board of Directors chose to create a special award to celebrate the teamwork and commitment to children of the staff of an entire program in the **School Team** category. The entire OMA team had the privilege of nominating and selecting the winners of this award.

The Pacific Northwest Montessori community in general, and in particular its Guides, truly rose to the challenge of following the needs of each child this past school year despite its circumstances, and your communities have noticed!

We are delighted to celebrate our four winners, as well as all of our nominees in this special edition of Forza Vitale!



Infant & Toddler Category
ANDY ORENSTEIN
 Portland Montessori Collaborative

What brought you to Montessori education and this particular age group you are working with?

I started out studying Reggio, and Montessori was not on my radar. Then I left early childhood education for a few years to pursue photography. I fell back into early childhood education after photographing the wedding of Mercedes, my current employer. She found out about my background and asked me if I could substitute from time to time. I loved being back with the children. When I took my Montessori training and learned about how much thought was put into the Montessori classroom, and I learned about the goal of world peace, I was sold. The classroom that I was in was a toddler classroom, which took some adjustment for me, but now I couldn't imagine working with any other age group.

Who or what were your earliest influences in your road to becoming an educator?

All of my coworkers at All Roads Learning Community (now Portland Montessori Collaborative) influenced me so much. I learned about true patience from SueAnn. I learned the importance of unconditional love from Mitra. I learned about the power of proximity from Dena, and Mercedes was like a guru for me, teaching me everything from the Montessori method to leadership, to the value of self evaluation and the importance of improvement and evolution. And, most importantly, these are the funniest people that I know. Through easy times and extremely difficult times, we always laughed, which made me look forward to coming to work each day.

Throughout your career, are there any students or family members you distinctly remember who changed the way you did or do things in the classroom?

I am certain that every single child and family has helped me become the educator that I am today. I am constantly learning from the children and families, and I try to incorporate these lessons into the classroom.

This year was very challenging for most of the humans on the planet. Do you remember what you were doing when you realized that your work with the students was going to be radically different? What thoughts did you have? Did you make any decisions at that point?

I remember being asked to develop a zoom gathering for the toddlers. I remember wondering how it might work out, or even if it could work out. It was very weird and awkward in the beginning, but we found a few little things that worked, and slowly got to a place that felt like I could hold their attention for a while. Then we learned that we were going back to in-person care under the emergency guidelines. It was all very difficult using parts of my brain that I'm not used to using. It helped to have the support of my coworkers and community. I just had to push through, knowing that we had each other's backs.

What are three things you wish you knew back then?

I think that it would've been nice to have a ballpark figure for how long the pandemic would last for. I think we all felt like it was gonna be over soon, but there wasn't much evidence either way. Otherwise there isn't much else that I wish I knew. The pandemic wasn't easy, but I don't have any regrets about how I navigated it.

What were some of the strategies you developed to help your students learn this year, while following the Montessori method?

Practical life. The beauty of practical life is that there will always be practical life. You can always create a new practical life curriculum based on how we are living. Let's practice washing our hands for 20 seconds, let's practice putting away mouthed toys, let's practice serving ourselves from our own lunchboxes.

What elements regarding diversity and inclusion did you include in your teaching plan for this year?

Like much of the country, I was outraged by the murder of George Floyd by the police. I took several anti-bias/anti-racism trainings in the past year. We added lots of books to the classroom library with diversity and inclusion themes. We have added some more pictures to the walls representing a more diverse group of people. We created a skin tone work, which we used as a jumping off point to discuss melanin. I am constantly searching for ways to discuss diversity with the toddlers.



Mary Hicks and Francesca Lowes present Andy with his award

We know that the pandemic affects all people in different ways, children and adults alike. What were the most challenging elements or moments you had to overcome this year? What did you do to get to “the other side” of them?

It felt like every aspect of life was impacted by the pandemic. I think over time, it all added up, and I felt exhausted. For me, nature was my lifeline. Going on as many walks/ hikes as possible helped to center and energize me to go again.

Is there any message you would like to share with your students at this moment?

The only thing that I can think to say is, “Thank You! Thank you for trusting me. Thank you for letting me guide you. Thank you for being my friend. Thank you for the hugs during this time when we are not touching other humans. Thank you for making me laugh. Thank you for the love!”

What does receiving the Outstanding Dedication to Montessori Education 2020/21 Award from OMA mean to you?

This award makes me feel so appreciative for my coworkers and community members who put their faith in me and hold me in such high regard. Again, I feel thankful. I love my community.

Primary Category
CLAIRE LUNDY
 Frog Song Montessori



What brought you to Montessori education and this particular age group you are working with?

I grew up in a very rocky household, filled with trauma, only to be released to an even rockier experience in and out of the foster care system. I have three siblings, who still reside in our hometown and have become a part of the cycle we were born into, and I feel deeply that my path to another way of living was education. Learning came easy to me and so I was presented with opportunities to learn and grow, move away from the place I grew up in and find a different way to live. My siblings were not so fortunate, and I know there may have been a lot of things that contributed to this, but education was something that I really believed to be a catalyst for me. With that, and being neglected for most of my childhood, I found that I had a relentless amount of energy and patience to support the needs of young children. More than that, I was driven to give them the time, space and nurturing environment that is so fundamental to their development! I find that even on my most difficult days, the children to me are merely reflections of their internal development, and any challenging behaviors that exist are clues for us, the guides, and how we can help them to get to their most optimal path of development!

Who or what were your earliest influences in your road to becoming an educator?

As noted above, my childhood experiences really influenced my desire to educate. Learning is something that is a lifelong passion for me, and I find that my relationship and confidence with learning has had a huge impact on my quality of life and happiness. So, naturally, I really wanted to help cultivate that in others, and quickly learned that that first experience of school that children have is very influential and can really set a child's foundation in learning for the rest of their life!

Throughout your career, are there any students or family members you distinctly remember who changed the way you did or do things in the classroom?

Oh my goodness, so many! This is a hard question because I really do believe in the idea that the Montessori classroom is for any child! My curriculum and classroom changes every year, depending on the children and the dynamics of the group. I guess I'll have to pick one... They talk a lot in the training course about how important it is to keep the classroom clean and orderly. I also really like to keep things clean and orderly for myself in my own spaces, so I found myself cleaning a lot. I would often take the time to clean when the children would go outside to play after lunch, while preparing the classroom for naptime. One day we had a very hectic transition and I wasn't able to get to my usual sweeping and cleaning. When the children came back in they quickly recognized how dirty the classroom was and banded together to get it swept and cleaned up! I suddenly realized that sometimes when we consistently do something we take away the opportunity for the children to notice and respond! I had a similar experience with responding to a child in need. For example, if a child dropped something off the table and was upset by it, or dropped and spilled a container of beads, I would respond right away. One day I was not able to respond, and other children quickly came to the need of the friend that was in trouble. A small voice in my head was always telling me, guide the child in need quickly so that the concentration of others isn't interrupted. But in consistently doing that I was taking away the opportunity for spontaneous prosocial interactions to happen, something that is so crucial to the development of social cohesion. So the overall lesson I keep getting reminded of is that the classroom is the children's environment, and although the act of not doing anything can be the hardest, it is also very important because it gives opportunities for the children to respond!

This year was very challenging for most of the humans on the planet. Do you remember what you were doing when you realized that your work with the students was going to be radically different? What thoughts did you have? Did you make any decisions at that point?

I don't remember an exact moment, but I do remember the re-opening of our school getting pushed and pushed. Finally, when the 2020 summer camp was canceled the severity of the pandemic was really starting to hit me! I was finding ways to meet the needs of families and children in my neighborhood and community, and it was clear that although everyone was at home, the children still needed a place of their own to be! They needed it now more than ever, and with 14 acres of land Frog Song was an ideal place for them to be! We decided to open as an emergency childcare center, restructured the classroom to be more covid safe, created an outdoor environment that extended from the indoor one and got right back to work! The children were so very happy to be in a place of their own, as were their parents, and honestly I was much happier too!

What are three things you wish you knew back then?

I wish that I knew that there was never going to be an "end" to the pandemic, that coronavirus was not being spread in preschool environments, and that we would all be vaccinated by the end of the year! So... maybe there is an "end" in sight...

What were some of the strategies you developed to help your students learn this year, while following the Montessori method?

Fortunately, we did get to be in class together and had a big outdoor environment to work with. We got to be mostly back to our regular teaching methods, minus sharing materials and eating at the same tables! We were lucky to not have to modify too many things! That being said, there were some adaptations we had to make. For example, some children wore masks because they were older or because their families requested them. To destigmatize this we would sing a song that said, "Even with my mask on, I'm still me!" The children loved it and it was a great redirecting tool when children were being teased for wearing one! It shifted the outlook on it and some of the optional mask wearers started wearing their masks more so that they could sing the song!

Before we returned to school we did some virtual learning. During that I would go out into nature and record videos of myself talking about insects, trees, plants, etc. Basically anything I would find! I found that giving the children a more concrete sensorial experience of a thing (rather than a picture that I talked about) helped them to be more engaged and learn more!

What elements regarding diversity and inclusion did you include in your teaching plan for this year?

With everything taking place in the world regarding the BLM movement, I really tried to select stories with people of color in them, choose true stories and artists to tell the children about that are people of color and to recognize and talk about differences in skin color. Not talking about it perpetuates the internalized racism that exists within us, so I would point it out, talk about it, recognize it and actually teach and talk about how some people have been treated differently because of their skin color so it is important that we change that by doing it differently!

We know that the pandemic affects all people in different ways, children and adults alike. What were the most challenging elements or moments you had to overcome this year? What did you do to get to "the other side" of them?

The most challenging part for me was meeting and working with the anxieties of parents. On one hand they were very grateful to have a place for their children to go, and on the other there were some very real anxieties arising due to the challenges of an unprecedented global pandemic. Much like with children, I've found that the best way to respond was to model how to listen compassionately, and be very direct and open in communication. Obviously, it is not our job as guides to alleviate the stresses of parents, but it is our job to support the children developmentally to the best of our ability. The more at ease we can help our parents to be, the better their relationship to us and their child will be, and the more positive their experience in our classroom will be. For me that means remembering that being a parent is a lot, that everyone is doing their best, and that it is important to not take things personally. If I can remember those things, then building compassionate relationships with parents comes very easily!

Is there any message you would like to share with your students at this moment?

I would like to share something that I am constantly reminded of every day that I spend with them. That the learning, the insight and the love of the teacher-child relationship goes both ways. Preschoolers see things in a way that adults can't and I am constantly surprised by the things I learn from them! They teach me to let go of any rigid thinking because opportunities for learning are all around us and we can find them as long as we are open to them. Parents always talk about how lucky their child or family is to be at Frog Song, but honestly I feel like the lucky one! To be able to bask in the authenticity of each child is a true gift, and I feel so thankful for that!

What does receiving the Outstanding Dedication to Montessori Education 2020/21 Award from OMA mean to you?

To me it means that I have done the kind of work that I have set out to do! It means that the Montessori community recognizes my dedication to the Montessori method and to the children, and that the community around me, Dharma Rain and the parents at Frog Song, see that as well. To me, the biggest part of this work is the day to day of it. Some days you are tired, some days it feels like you can't do any more and some days it feels like you should be doing so much more. The fact that the community around me sees the work that I am doing with the children and appreciates it helps me to feel compassionate toward myself in the process. That will allow me to take a step back, breathe and continue to strive to create the best program for the children that come into our classroom! This is lifelong work for me, and receiving this award helps me to see that I am on the right path.



Claire and three of her students



Elementary & Middle School Category

GABRIEL BARBER

Montessori School of Beaverton

What brought you to Montessori education and this particular age group you are working with?

I was a Montessori child, attending primary at Blue Mountain Montessori School in LaGrande, Oregon, so I was always familiar with Montessori education. Although my background is in business and marketing, when my oldest son was born I was reconnected with this way of relating with children. I initially trained to be a Primary guide, but after learning about the characteristics of the second plane of development, the way children this age think and start to see themselves as the ones that will change the world, I decided to take the Elementary training as well.

Who or what were your earliest influences in your road to becoming an educator?

I was fortunate to spend a great deal of time with my two sons when they were growing up, and seeing them develop and mature left me seeking ways to help this process beyond just natural instincts. When they began school at a local Montessori program, I was able to volunteer and was amazed at the things they were capable of when given the proper guidance and opportunities. It wasn't long after that I decided I wanted to bring that guidance and opportunity to other children. What I didn't know at the time was how taking the training would deepen my connection with my own children, and seeing the multitalented, kind, and good-natured people they are becoming has been the greatest joy of my life.

Throughout your career, are there any students or family members you distinctly remember who changed the way you did or do things in the classroom?

I believe most educators would agree that each child they work with leaves an indelible mark. I thoroughly enjoy the relationship I'm able to develop with my students and their families; it is one of the best parts of being a Montessori teacher and the three-year cycle. There have been some who've pushed my understanding of what it means to support a child in need, others who have indirectly challenged me to be better, and others who have helped me see how perceived limitations have a way of becoming assets.

This year was very challenging for most of the humans on the planet. Do you remember what you were doing when you realized that your work with the students was going to be radically different? What thoughts did you have? Did you make any decisions at that point?

I had a bad cold the week before Spring Break last year and missed several days of work. I thought I'd have the break to recover and then, with certain modifications, we'd be back in the classroom to finish out the year. I was fairly quickly disabused of that notion, as the world we all knew rapidly changed. The Elementary team met daily over the break to figure out a schedule and a plan for finishing out the year online as best we could. It was especially important to me that the 6th year students had the opportunity to finish their time at MSB on as positive a note as possible and that the other students still had the opportunity to be engaged in productive learning opportunities.

What are three things you wish you knew back then?

I wish I could have known how long the pandemic was actually going to last, how to lead a PE class on Zoom, and where to find a mask that wouldn't make my glasses fog up.

What were some of the strategies you developed to help your students learn this year, while following the Montessori method?

I think, ultimately, this past year has been about not being afraid to try things and keep what works and discard what doesn't. I knew we wanted to build off of what was successful at the end of the 2019/20 school year, which was making time to engage with every child beyond just scheduling them for lessons and posting assignments on Google Classroom. They needed to know, without a doubt, the adults they had counted on were still there and cared about them deeply. I enjoyed working with OMA over the summer to help to refine the Distance Learning Model, and then share it with the larger Elementary community, and it's essentially the plan we've utilized throughout this year.

What elements regarding diversity and inclusion did you include in your teaching plan for this year?

I'm privileged to teach in a classroom that is majority children of color, and working with these children and their families has afforded me the opportunity to broaden my perspective on how children can be raised and nurtured. This year has also, unfortunately, provided ample opportunities to discuss the history of race and racism in this country and how that legacy impacts our lives to this day. They weren't always easy conversations, but I wanted the students to see how important it was to be aware of these issues and for them to see it was something I took seriously and tried to improve upon every day.

I was also inspired by the student panel hosted by IDA-Oregon and OMA when launching the D.R.E.A.M Project. Especially the stories the students shared about what worked and didn't work for them with distance learning. As a result, we made sure to record every lesson and take pictures of any notes and then attach them to every assignment posted on Google Classroom. This way children could engage with the content again and at their own pace if needed. I've also carved out time in my schedule for children that needed the extra support, to collaborate with their families on strategies that could lead to beneficial outcomes.

We know that the pandemic affects all people in different ways, children and adults alike. What were the most challenging elements or moments you had to overcome this year? What did you do to get to "the other side" of them?

This year was challenging beyond just the pandemic and the transition to online learning. I began working with a new assistant guide, we didn't have an assistant to start the year, and when we finally had all the roles covered, that person left. All while trying to ensure that 44 students were making academic progress and staying engaged and emotionally healthy. Personally, as a single father, I also wanted to keep my sons safe, both physically and emotionally, and ensure they were staying connected academically as well. I've relied on coworkers, my family, and some good friends for encouragement and guidance. It was with their support that I could get through to "the other side" each day.

Is there any message you would like to share with your students at this moment?

It was for you that I stayed up late at night and got up early every morning. You absolutely deserve the best of the adults around you, and you proved why every single day. By showing up, with your cameras on (mostly!), ready to learn and find reasons to smile and laugh, you've made this year possible. You should be incredibly proud of the work you've put in this year and how adaptable to change you've been. Learn from this year that you can overcome a challenge, even if it seems daunting at first.

What does receiving the Outstanding Dedication to Montessori Education 2020/21 Award from OMA mean to you?

If someone told me two years ago that I was capable of what I've accomplished, together with my colleagues and students, I don't think I would have believed them. It's been a tremendous amount of work and it has felt especially rewarding to receive this award in recognition of that.

Thank you to OMA and the Awards committee for finding a way to recognize that this year provided many challenges for educators. I truly believe that every guide listed in this issue of the Forza was deserving of this award. After the school year is over and we've slept for two weeks straight, I look forward to reconnecting with my fellow guides and reminiscing about the year that's been.



Gabriel receiving his award while Mary Hicks, Francesca Lowes, and some of his students look on

Special Category: School Team

HARMONY MONTESSORI SCHOOL



The entire OMA team chose to recognize the staff of Harmony Montessori School for their resilience, commitment, compassion and guidance of their students during the extraordinary challenges they had to overcome during the 2020/2021 school year.



Kim Greer, Head of School, welcoming Mary Hicks and Francesca Lowes



Keinya Kholbecker receiving the award on behalf of the team

20/21 Reflections

WE ASKED ALL OF OUR NOMINEES TO SHARE SOME OF THEIR EXPERIENCES FROM THIS SCHOOL YEAR



WHAT WAS THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF YOUR WORK WITH STUDENTS THIS YEAR?



I learned that our understanding of young children can be applied towards a positive result even without much of what we normally think of as essential to our practice.

-Curt Gottfried, Portland Montessori, Primary

Seeing the resilience in my students and their patience finally be rewarded with a return to school in the hybrid method.

-Jack Graham, Sunstone Montessori, Elementary

The children's resiliency really stands out. This past year has been so full of uncertainty, it's almost palpable in the air. As we prepared for the children's return last summer we didn't know what to expect! They surprised us all with their joy to be with one another and their acceptance of all the changes. I will forever be grateful for how children help me live in the moment.

-Megan Gerry, Portland Montessori Collaborative, Primary

The most rewarding aspect of working with students this year was creating community. Creating an online community for the first two-thirds of the school year looked quite different than in the classroom, but there were so many rewarding moments. Distance learning offered some unique opportunities that wouldn't have been possible in the classroom, like pet parades, mini-concerts, and plentiful opportunities for sharing items from home. The children showed so much creativity in their approach to connection this year.

-Rachel Morris, Childpeace Montessori, Elementary

We were in hybrid learning until April. When we came back full-time in person it was wonderful seeing how much the students really learned at home, and how excited they were to be in person each day. Our class is mostly Montessori converts this past year. It was wonderful seeing their cursive take shape, and their interest level in self-guided learning take off!

-Dan Euclide, Little Oak Montessori, Elementary

Seeing the growth and resilience of children as they learned to navigate an unknown world along with everyone else. My biggest goal for this year was to support my students' social and emotional health through this pandemic. Over the past year, I have seen so much joy and enthusiasm to share experiences with friends. I have watched children eagerly seek out new lessons and excitedly revisit ones they had learned in previous years.

-Bethany Haight, Portland Montessori School, Primary

This year, I felt so much joy and happiness to witness the children's innate drive to connect with others in community. After so much time in isolation last spring and, for many, through the summer, it was wonderful to support children to engage in meaningful, purposeful work in a prepared environment. I am so grateful to the children and families who bring brightness to my days.

-Maren Thomas, Childpeace Montessori, Primary



"I took this picture soon after reopening. I don't think there is a better representation of this last year. Grey clouds hovering over, rainbow popping up giving the message of warm and bright sun somewhere close by."

-Adeela Majeed, Montessori Cares

Absolutely their creativity. When we returned to campus with COVID restrictions, two girls played the card game War across their two tables, each with their own deck. Before we scored a ping pong table for each room, students flipped the rolling whiteboards to play atop. A couple of students are recreating Candyland inside of Google Slides. Students are organizing a schoolwide online chess tournament so all four cohorts can play each other. The yearbook crew discovered that the "backup option" of photoshopping everyone into a group picture for advisory groups is actually hilarious and even better than a regular picture (one of the pictures is Sesame Street-themed. The photoshopper took one for the team and created herself as Oscar the Grouch). Everywhere we turn, they're thinking of new ways to be together, to adapt and recreate their own group culture.

-Sara Adams, Metro Montessori Middle School

It has felt very rewarding to be able to provide consistency and purpose for the children and families in my class during such a time of uncertainty. It seemed especially important in the beginning of quarantine when lockdown was new, to be able to offer a version of school that maintained some normalcy for my students. I also got to know the parents in my community much more closely because all of a sudden I was teaching through devices in their homes five days a week, and we were all navigating something very new together. I have shared a lot of teary moments and a lot of laughs with them over the past year!

-Ashley Keneller, West Hills Montessori, Elementary



Children are pliable to their circumstance. Learning it in the toughest situation during this pandemic is irreplaceable. Getting warm and reaching out efforts of our little community was reassuring and I would not change it for anything else. We lost a lot of family and were left with ONLY THE STRONG ONES. The biggest reward was the dedication and commitment of the families to Montessori Cares School. Everyone pulled in to make sure teachers are paid and school does not go under. From this last year, we all have come out stronger and more considerate towards one another.

-Adeela Majeed, Montessori Cares, Primary

-Connecting with students thru a screen and teaching them virtually for 7 months, then being able to see their hard work once we went back in person

-Getting to have one on one time uninterrupted to work with each child when we were in CDL (that is truly unheard of, even in the classroom!)

-Remembering why I love this age group and that it's about the connection, even if it's just with the parent

-Seeing the light bulb moments when children are first reading!

-Ana VanderPol, The Ivy School, Primary



WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU SEND TO FUTURE MONTESSORI EDUCATORS THAT WOULD LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT TEACHING IN A MONTESSORI PROGRAM DURING THE PANDEMIC?

"Here is our human body fair. Done in person and at home." -Dan Euclide, Little Oak Montessori, Elementary

I taught online for about a year. Especially in the beginning, I tried dozens of new programs, techniques, and methodologies. I obsessed about workflows and schedules, and had nightmares of forgetting scheduled Google Meets. And no matter how many gizmos and gadgets I tried, I found that the treasure was ultimately right back where I started. The fundamentals of "being" in a Montessori way are always available: observing, connecting, meeting young people where they're at and walking alongside them as best we can.

What I observed was that students needed touch-points of connection and humor, and anything predictable was appreciated. I started having a different start-of-class ritual for each class. For example, I would start my Humanities class with a bizarre riddle from a small book I found in a local free library, and students would yell out their guesses, often coming up with answers that were a million times better than the true answer and/or extremely funny. Often it cut into our academic time more than expected, but I learned that these rituals were very important for maintaining a thread of connection and predictability, two of the hardest things to come by during the pandemic.

-Sara Adams, Metro Montessori Middle School

Take deep
breaths and
know you
can do it,
as hard as it
may seem at
times.

-Megan Gerry, Portland Montessori
Collaborative, Primary

Observe, Observe, Observe. We come
out of training programs trained and
enthusiastic. Next step is to Observe,
Listen, and Mold.

-Adeela Majeed, Montessori Cares,
Primary

I think that my experience of guiding a Montessori class during a pandemic was (mostly) successful because I tried hard to be creative and flexible with my students and with myself. I tried my best to make it fun, and to help the kids feel connected to their community, even when we couldn't physically be together. This often meant going outside of the Montessori curriculum and adding things like virtual book clubs, Lego club, craft projects, virtual lunches, daily read aloud sessions, and even Friday evening Netflix parties. If I ever felt guilty about straying too far from my albums, I reminded myself that treating the children with respect and honoring their developmental needs is at the heart of a Montessori guide's job. As long as I was doing that, and we were having good days amidst a global pandemic, we were doing great!

-Ashley Keneller, West Hills Montessori, Elementary

-Trust the process! It's not about the albums (while it is at times), they are the starting point not the end point....and there's nothing in our album to tell us how to handle a pandemic

-Don't get stuck in the weeds of things, it's easy to do when we want things to look exactly right. The children are so forgiving and also are still learning more than just reading and writing (This applies to non-pandemic times too)

-You'd be surprised what children can learn even through a screen! Cursive for example....it can be done!

-Don't be afraid to be creative! There really is no limit to what you can teach.

-Ana VanderPol, The Ivy School, Primary

I don't have an image, but I have a word: Pivot

We as educators and Montessorians already are masters at pivoting, the pandemic teaching pushed us to our limits at times, but forced us to embrace technology in a way we hadn't previously and perhaps was the encouragement we needed to let go of "WHAT WE THOUGHT" to embrace "WHAT COULD BE".....

-Ana VanderPol, The Ivy School, Primary

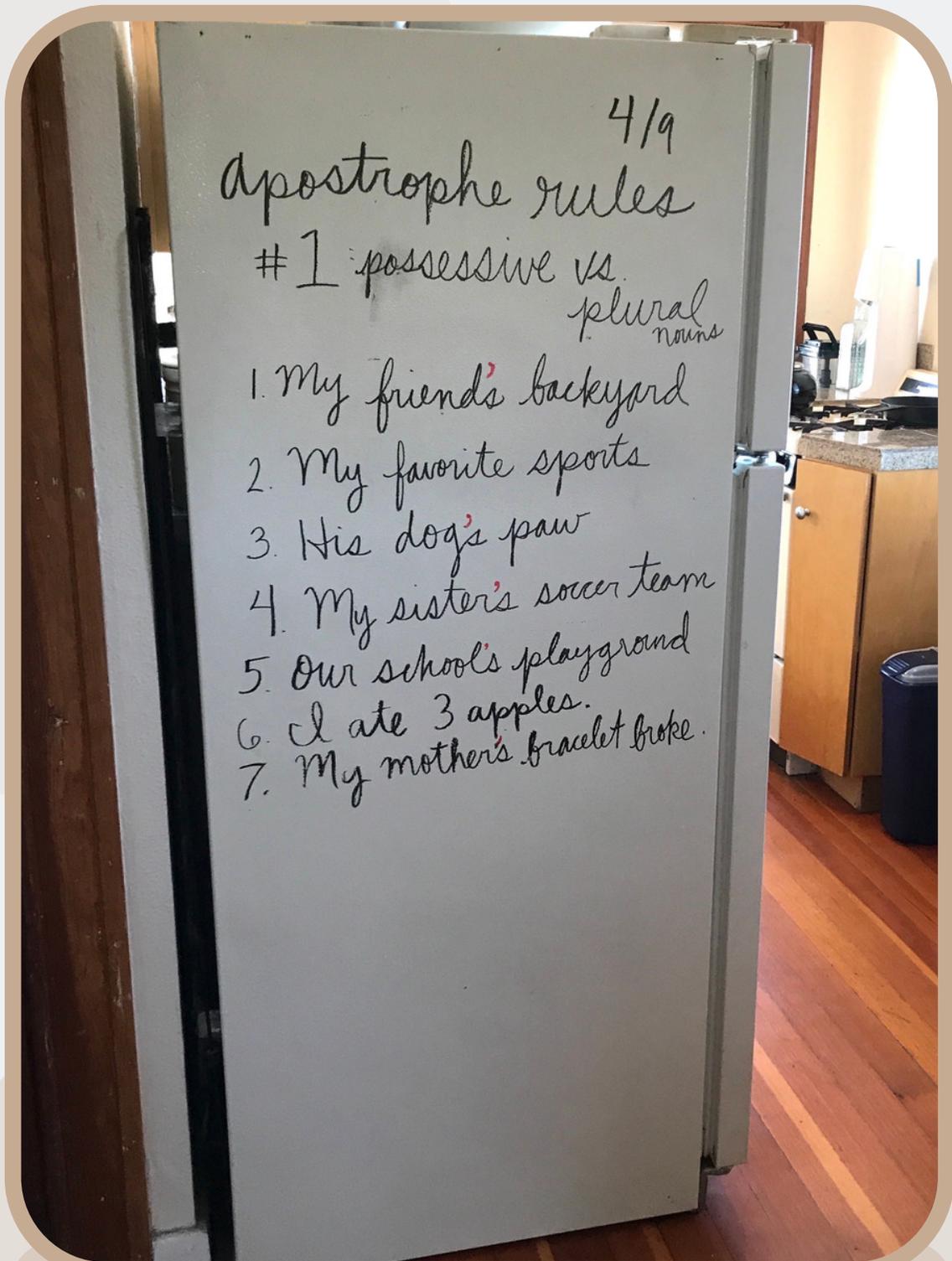
"This [photo] shows me planting a redwood seed over Zoom with my class as part of a botany lesson. We are called the "Redwood Room," so it was pretty special. The students immediately started brainstorming where we could plant our future giant redwood so that it could grow to be huge and how we could ensure that no one would ever cut it down."

-Ashley Keneller, West Hills Montessori, Elementary Program



"[Here] is a picture that represents the school year for me. It is my set up in week one of school right before I prepared to tell the Universe Story to my students via Zoom."

-Rachel Morris, Childpeace Montessori, Elementary



"This is a picture of my refrigerator. I used it as a whiteboard to teach lessons-- when we did language lessons, we called it 'refridge-a-grammar!'"

-Ashley Keneller, West Hills Montessori, Elementary Program

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FORZA VITALE!

