

Sharpen the Saw

by Maren Stark-Schmidt

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“The adult is the most important part of a child's environment,” my Montessori trainer told us. “We need to make sure we remain healthy, well-rested, and interesting people. Only then can we be of true service to the child.” “Remember this,” she continued, “when you're tempted to stay up late to do a project for the classroom, when you start to make excuses for not exercising or eating right because you are too busy, and you don't make time for any interests outside of your work with the children.”

Prevention was what my trainer was advocating. When I've forgotten this advice, I've dealt with that fire-breathing monster called burnout. As teachers and parents we need to learn that it's critical to take care of ourselves and take time to renew, refresh, and recreate ourselves.

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey recommends that we stop often and sharpen our saw. Abraham Lincoln was reported to say: “If I had eight hours to cut down a tree, I'd spend six hours sharpening my ax.” The time we use to sharpen ourselves is time well spent.

In our 24/7 world of cell phones, email, all-night stores, work, children's activities, business travel, and more, it is challenging to set up parameters to have personal time in order to be healthy, well-rested, and interesting. There are many needs to be met, making it difficult to find time to sharpen our saws and self-renew.

It is essential for us to make time for our personal *re-creation*. One priority should be to schedule time every week for you and your spouse. Happy marriages produce happy children, in our families, and in our classrooms. When our daughters were preschoolers, we alternated between two neighborhood teenagers to babysit on Saturday afternoons from one to five o'clock. My husband and I would go to a movie, have lunch, or take a walk. We had time to visit without the children's demands on us. We also knew we had this time each week, so tensions didn't build up. Our sitters were thrilled to stay in the afternoon, having time and money to do things with their friends in the evening. These Saturday afternoons helped keep our relationship healthy and interesting.

If money for a babysitter is an obstacle for finding time for yourself, be creative and start a babysitting co-op. The key to a successful babysitting co-op is to have explicit expectations and consequences spelled out for the members. In the three years I was involved with a co-op no one abused the privilege or the responsibility. Two members sponsored prospective members. There were twelve in our group though groups with only four members have been successful. To begin we each had ten hours of credit. If a member's balance reached zero, he or she had to “deposit” ten hours of babysitting before using the co-op again. Members called the bookkeeper, who arranged the babysitting. We each took turns being the bookkeeper for a month once a year.

Sleep specialists tell us that as adults we need eight hours of sleep per day. When we don't get our daily doze, we begin to accumulate sleep deficit. This lack of sleep affects our sleep cycle, our ability to concentrate, our energy levels, and our critical thinking skills. In the long run, by getting eight hours of sleep per day with a regular schedule of bedtime and wake-ups, we'll be healthier, well-rested and more interesting.

As Montessori teachers, it can be easy for us to be consumed by the needs of the children in our classroom. There seems to be always another piece of material to make, a lesson to perfect, parent

conferences to plan, along with our daily work of guiding each child's development. In our passion for being a help to life, we can let our work take over every waking minute of our lives and neglect our physical fitness, family, friends, diet, hobbies, and other interests. When we find ourselves in a situation where we are saying “no” to these activities frequently, we need to stop and consider this: the adult is the most important part of a child's environment. Take the time you need to be physically fit, have time with friends and family, and pursue interest outside of your Montessori work. Make appointments with yourself to do these important activities. A friend of mine blocks off time on her calendar using the initials M.E.

As school administrators we need to encourage and create a school environment that helps our staff keep their work in proportion to their lives. New teachers need mentoring to help learn how to manage all the details of their classroom communities. Teachers need to be encouraged to be out of the building by a certain time each day. Also, we need to make sure that special school activities are reasonable and of mutual benefit to our school community. There needs to be ongoing staff discussion and training on how to be more efficient and effective at both the classroom level and as a whole school. These actions can help our teachers create equilibrium in their lives and thus be more vital in their efforts with children.

Keeping ourselves in balance keeps our world in balance. Remember: “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” Creativity is needed to find the time to remain healthy, interesting, and well-rested. We are worth it. Our families are worth it. Our children are worth it.

Sharpen your saw regularly. Your kids will love you for it. Best of all, you'll love you too.

Public Montessori in Oregon

By David Ayer

Public Montessori in Oregon? Alive and well, thank you very much! Oregon supports six public Montessori programs serving children from three years old through eight grade, with a seventh on the way.

All but two of Oregon's public Montessori programs are charter schools. Nationally, about one-third of public programs, with the rest evenly divided between whole-school district or magnet programs, classrooms *within* a district or magnet. (I believe a Portland-area district had a Montessori program in the 1980s, but I haven't been able to find any information — if you know something about it, please contact me!). They date back to the year 2000, with the founding of Ridgeline in Eugene, with the newest, Desert Sky in Bend, slated to open in September 2017.

Ridgeline Montessori Public Charter School: Ridgeline opened 2000 with a single lower elementary classroom, and has grown to serve 200 children from kindergarten to eighth grade. Originally pitched to the district as an alternative school, which the district declined, the school was among the first applicants under Oregon's 1999 charter school law.

Ridgeline is currently running a crowd funding event as part of a capital campaign — contribute [here](#)!

The **Native Montessori Project**, founded in 2002, has a fascinating history you can read more about [here](#). After years of success and a period of dormancy, the program re-opened in 2014, serving 20 three and four year old children of Native American heritage in a Montessori program infused with Native culture.

Lewis and Clark Montessori Charter School in Damascus, profiled [here](#) on [MontessoriPublic](#), launched in 2008 with three classrooms and now serves 315 children from kindergarten through eighth grade. Long-time Oregon Montessorian Melissa Harbert now leads the school, which also serves as a community center, offering youth and adult community education programs, service projects including meals for homebound seniors, and even a farmer's market.

The Ivy School in northeast Portland, founded in 2009, grew out of

Tammy Kennedy's [Montessori of Alameda](#) and now serves more than 250 children from first through eighth grade on two campuses.

[The Community Roots School](#) in Silverton opened the same year (2009) with lower elementary, and has since added a kindergarten program and expects to expand to middle school next year. Read more about Community Roots [here](#).

[Alder Montessori](#), at [Alder Elementary School](#) in the Rockwood neighborhood of Gresham, on the edge of northeast Portland, is a partnership among [Montessori Northwest](#), Reynolds School District, and [Have A Dream Oregon](#), serving 20 three and four year olds from an extremely high-poverty, high-risk population. The program, which only launched in 2015, recently received Oregon Preschool Promise funding and is exploring possibilities for extending the age range and adding a second classroom. More about Alder can be found [here](#).

Finally, Oregon's newest public Montessori school is likely to be [Desert Sky Montessori](#) in Bend, which has an ambitious plan to open in 2017 with 150 students from kindergarten through fifth grade. You can read about the vision and development of the project, through an extensive planning process and several charter applications towards their expected successful proposal this fall, right [here](#).

Public Montessori in Oregon faces the same challenges such programs face everywhere: funding, convincing education leaders and policy makers, maintaining Montessori fidelity, assessment, serving three and four year olds, and more. Each of these programs is approaching these issues in its own way and finding its own solutions, and each is advancing the cause of public Montessori and bringing more Montessori to more children who otherwise would never have been able to experience it.

Public Montessori is in a growth period nationally, driven by a strong current of social justice within the Montessori world and beyond it, as well as by emerging research showing the strong outcomes of high fidelity Montessori implementation. The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector ([NCMPS](#)) has been a strong advocate and supporter for this movement. In 2016, NCMPS re-launched the well-known and loved Public School Montessorian newspaper as [MontessoriPublic](#), a website,

Facebook page, email newsletter and more reporting on and promoting public Montessori. I've been fortunate enough to take on the project as a full-time job, which has given me the opportunity to tell the stories I've touched on above. To stay up to date on the public Montessori world, readers can follow the blog, subscribe to the email newsletter, and "like" the page on [Facebook](#) — the more people we can get involved, the further our message will spread.

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Holidays

BY GINNI SACKETT

The holidays are approaching – ushering in a frequently scary season for Montessori teachers. We often have conflicted feelings around holidays and events that occur in the larger culture – afraid that these distract children from their work, disrupt the calm and productive atmosphere in the environment, and are just plain bothersome to us. I'd like to propose changing those feelings and finding ways to see these popular culture events as positive elements in the environment and exploring ways to channel them in support of each child's development.

All human cultures have holidays. Here are some developmentally appropriate reasons to accept and embrace holidays in the lives of young children.

- Holidays are an expression of universal human needs and tendencies and they occur predictably as a universal expression of human existence across time and space
- They are an important part of the cosmic human experience – holidays structure our orientation to and interpretation of our experience as a species and as individuals; they order and regulate our relationship to the human and non-human worlds, to both everyday and profound experience, to the known and the unknown
- Holidays are extremely significant for human social, emotional, and spiritual life and they are closely connected with our culturally-derived definitions of the sacred (the English word comes from “holy-days”)
- Holidays tend to be highly ritualized: individuals as well as social groups become strongly connected to and dependent upon the repetition of holiday-specific events and activities to regulate their lives
- Holidays are culturally specific – they are often seasonal events that repeat according to a predictable time schedule from year to year, associated with specific seasonal conditions
- Strong emotional attachments develop around these events, part of the deep-seated feelings of love and attachment for one's time and place created by the Absorbent Mind.



So, these are the universal human realities we're up against when we try to ignore the holidays occurring everywhere else in our children's lives. Strategies such as acting as if they aren't

happening, or telling children not to talk about them, mean that we aren't acknowledging the significance they hold in children's lives. In fact, I would suggest that when we react against holidays in these ways, we are passing judgment onto the culture our children are adapting to and onto the child for wanting to adapt to that culture. And that kind of unspoken, negative judgment just doesn't seem like a desirable foundation for a positive relationship between a developing child and an adult guide (or the guide and parents either!).

In a culture such as we have here in the United States, we also often react against holidays because so many of the ways they are 'celebrated' go against the characteristics and needs of children. But we don't have to throw out the baby with the bath water! Instead, we are in the perfect position to offer a balancing experience which can focus and relieve children of the burdens of holiday hype.

Here are some ways to start that:

- First, do your homework: what holidays typically occur in the lives of your own community of children? Find some information about the origins of those cultural events – there's a good chance that there will be a concrete, sensorial context that helped previous humans come to terms with some aspect of life on this planet. For example: Halloween was once new year's eve, marking the end of the harvest and the start of a new year in northern and temperate biomes; Christmas is one of many festivals that just happen to occur around the return of light after the winter solstice – another profound and potentially scary time for those humans living above the tropics; Valentine's Day is a remnant festival marking the mating of birds in southern Europe and like Easter is one of many festivals that celebrated the promise of the Spring Equinox.
- Next, find ways to incorporate these concrete, sensorial origins into the life of the children's community – applying all of the principles of Montessori education, child development, and work which inspire Montessori environments. Stories, songs, specific vocabulary, language cards, carefully chosen artifacts, question games, food preparation, expression and art, geography, zoology, and botany can all provide ready opportunities to structure the holiday experiences which are happening in our children's lives outside our protected classrooms.
- Create some parent education opportunities to share Montessori perspectives that match the universal development of their children.
- Create your own rituals in the classroom around these annual events so that children experience the positive role of holidays in human life, but in ways that are calm, happy, and productive for everyone (including you!).



When I began to apply these strategies in my own Casa, I discovered that holidays aren't scary or disruptive at all; in fact, the time between Thanksgiving and the winter holidays became one of my favorite times of the year. I also discovered that – once that negative judgment was eliminated from our environment – children not only enjoyed our cultural cycles but they actually were able to naturally and spontaneously settle into wonderful, normalized work right up to that last day before winter break.

Let's not leave our children at the mercy of commercialized and hyped-up American holidays. Let's do what we do best: prepare and provide a safe and supportive environment that channels those scattered and frantic energies and actually help children not only survive but more importantly enjoy these seasonal events in harmony with our universal tendencies and needs.



Ginni Sackett is a trainer, lecturer, consultant and examiner of the Association Montessori Internationale. She is passionate about advancing the international Montessori movement and bringing the benefits of Montessori education to children worldwide. Ginni has presented at regional, national and international workshops and conferences and has had articles published in AMI Communications, the NAMTA Journal and Forza Vitale. She lives in southeast Portland with her husband, Jon, where they raised five children. Ginni is a third-degree black belt in an Indonesian martial art, enjoys exploring the charms of Portland, and loves spending time with her family, including her three grandchildren.