

Kind Words, Modeling And Bullying Behavior

by Kathy Cotner

We talk a lot at school about using kind words with our friends and treating each other with respect. We strive to lead by example and encourage parents to do the same. We all hope that our manner, tone, and choice of words will help model appropriate behavior in our children and create a peaceful environment for all children. Peaceful environments are learning, creating, and inspiring places where innovation and collaboration are fostered. The power between the children is equal and balanced. An unbalance of power between children leads to bullying. In researching ways to curb bullying in schools specifically in younger populations, a number of common practices among both parents and professionals have come into question. Four of the most interesting are: sharing, gossiping, over-scheduling and spectating.

Sharing is a learned skill that takes time, maturity and encouragement to develop fully. Children who are forced to share, especially at a young age, experience a feeling of powerlessness. This causes children to search for other ways to regain their power. Instead we can encourage, model, offer alternatives, and offer assistance.

Gossiping within earshot of children is modeling teasing, plain and simple. It's indirect bullying, better done away from children or, when we can muster the courage, not at all. If you have ever seen a child walking around with a pretend cell phone screeching, "Wow! No! Really? I can't believe they would do that!" with eyes wide, and hands waving, you know what I mean.

Over-scheduling children in order to provide them the best advantages so they don't miss out, fails to recognize that the most important thing that young children need is free time. If your child has a passion, by all means allow them time to explore it. But kids need unstructured free play time, creative time, and quiet time not enforced by a parent. Over-scheduling leads to stressed kids. Stressed kids leads to anxiety, anger, and aggression which paves the way for bullying.

Spectating, which is passively watching others be bullied, seems harmless, but is the most powerful facilitator of bullying at any age. The more spectating is excused, the more powerful the bullying becomes. We become desensitized to bullying just like other more physical forms of violence. Every time we watch someone or something happen that we could help prevent with a word or an action, we become peers to bullying.

Not sabotaging our efforts to raise kind and caring kids begins with us. We need to curb our use of negative talk and choose positive alternatives and choices. We need to let kids be kids and not projects needing shaping or vessels to fill. We need to constantly show that we care in our words and our actions. Our children are learning how to react to life through our actions. Let's strive to make what we do count.

Montessori or Kindergarten?

by Ann Messick

The decision have your 5-year-old child continue in a Montessori Children's House or move to a kindergarten class can be a challenging one. I would like to share some observations, insights from Maria Montessori, examples of the possibilities of work for these older children, and offer a few questions that may help you in this process. From my experience as a guide and as a parent, I believe strongly that a "complete" Montessori experience is a true foundation for life, and that the culminating or final year in a Children's House is essential to the completion of a purposeful continuum.

Maria Montessori was a careful and thoughtful observer of children. She created materials for the children's use that would aid them in their self-construction. She recognized that humans pass through planes of development, and within each plane there are certain general characteristics and basic needs. The Children's House is prepared for children from the ages of approximately 3 to 6 years, meaning that the materials and activities of the Children's House are designed specifically for the developmental needs of children in this complete age span. Children of this age have totally absorbent minds, which are drawn to certain activities by inner motivations called "sensitive periods." We know that 6 year olds are different in many ways than 3 year olds as they begin to evolve from their absorbent minds into conscious, reasoning minds. Therefore, the "work" is set up as a continuum.

The first couple years of the child's experience in the Children's House are laying a foundation. A child at three absorbs the order within the environment and begins to orient himself in this new place. He is able to begin exploring once he feels safe and secure in this caring community. He is exposed to a variety of work and develops the ability to focus his complete attention, and to love "his work." He develops friendships, and learns how to live in a community larger than his own family.

These first years are full of exploration and discovery; the development of basic skills, including coordination of large and small muscles and hand/eye coordination; and developing an internal sense of order through a sequence of activities. Children work for the pure love of work. They experience sounds, dimensions, shapes, textures, tastes, colors and relationships with their senses. They repeat pouring, spooning, scrubbing and washing in the process of perfecting their skills. They learn to identify and isolate the sounds in their language and the symbols that represent these sounds. They count and manipulate rods, spindles, tablets and counters, developing a sensorial concept of number and quantity. They explore maps, music, art and simple science projects.

All the while, they are living in a community of others who care for and respect one another. These younger children can ask for help from an older child in tying their apron, carrying their map, cleaning a spill, even learning how to use a piece of work. There is a spirit of nurturance, cooperation and interdependence amongst all the children. As the child returns each fall, confidence increases. The surroundings are familiar, most of the children are familiar. A feeling of security develops.

With this secure foundation, children in their final year begin to become aware of what they know; the building blocks can now be utilized for expanded intellectual and personal exploration. These children now have a special opportunity to be one of the oldest children in their community. Due to their increased confidence and competencies they are now one of the leaders and role models. They take on this role with grace and enthusiasm. In the past they have watched others, practiced, and even anticipated this role. Now we witness confidence, pride in work, empathy, understanding, compassion, respect for others, cooperation, self-discipline, responsibility, and independence.

This final year is truly an empowering year - a year of enhanced self-esteem. The early years in Montessori have been filled with many small successive successes; they've worked at their own pace and followed their interests, and error has been a friend. And now these children take on challenges (personally and academically) with self-assurance. During this culminating year, I have been so impressed with children's character development, their ability to live in and contribute to a peaceful community, and their "academic" achievements.

What distinct characteristics do we see in these older children? They are beginning to ask about the unseen, about causes, and they are listening to the answers. They are developing an interest in ethics, what is fair and what is right. They are interested in true stories about people who have made ethics their passion, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa. They are more social, able and wanting to work in groups to perform a play, create a quilt or organize a fundraising activity. Their peer relationships are more organized. They are becoming conscious of what they know. They are displaying physical and mental strength, wanting to challenge this growth. They are interested in the abstract; they are dealing with ideas. They are intrigued by the universe and inter-relatedness. They are interested in cultural anthropology and global geography. Our work with these older children helps them to become conscious of what they have learned in the previous years, and actually feeds their developing skills and interests.

These children will continue to work in all areas of the room, but often in different ways than before. They will now work to accomplish something, more for the satisfaction and delight of the end result. They will notice the needs of their community and respond with their refined skills - truly the essence of responsibility. They will often wash cloths, iron them, and return them for use in the community. They may be involved in the preparation of snack, in the serving of a guest, in the planning, preparations, and cooking for a special occasion. They have mastered the dressing frames, so they can help the younger children with their tying, buttoning, zipping. They also are applying the skills they have gained through use of the practical life materials to explore other areas, such as botanical study, science experiments, and explorations into geometry. They are giving lessons to the younger children, which not only nurtures the younger child, but also reinforces for the older children their own knowledge. What better way to strengthen one's own knowledge than to be able to teach it to another? These children can think ahead and plan what they will need to accomplish a goal that they have set for themselves. They can notice and analyze a sequence. Language is added to all that they do in labeling the materials and actions. Children return to the sensorial materials as "old friends" to work on particular skills. For example, if a child appears to be having difficulty writing, it may be that she is pressing too hard. She may need to refine her lightness of touch by using the touch tablets. We also add language to all the sensorial materials - colors, sounds, dimensions, geometric shapes and more. We can

hand a child a set of labels with certain qualities and ask him to find the work that has these qualities. The child will then work with the material and label it (such as long, longer, longest, short, shorter, and shortest with the red rods). We continually encourage children to expand their knowledge gained with the materials to the environment in the classroom, in the yard, and in their world. These children can create their own sensorial materials. They can make a poster of the four cylinder blocks, the pink tower, the brown stair. They can create the geometric solids out of clay or sew pillows in geometric shapes. This sensorial grounding becomes the source for children's burgeoning imaginations.

The older children's artwork often becomes more realistic, and is now often used to illustrate a story, poem or report they have written. Children create and publish their own books. The media available to them expands beyond the basics to blending pastels, creating cultural collages and nature collages around a theme. Music is taken to another level with their own compositions using the bells. They often play their songs for the children who are walking on the line. These children are beginning to enter a new developmental period that we call "the acquisition of culture." They are seeing the world with new eyes, and thus we offer them opportunities to quench their thirst for knowledge. These children investigate botany and zoology, which are both connected to geography. Their geography work moves beyond sensorially working with maps, to establishing projects about countries, indigenous animals, and people and their culture (cultural anthropology - how people all over the world meet the same basic needs and how these methods differ according to climate, resources, technology). Because this is an open-ended continuum, children can explore as far or as in depth as their interest takes them, and in the process continue to develop personal and academic skills.

Maria Montessori described children's emergence into both writing and reading as an "explosion." Once the groundwork has been laid, children seem to write and read overnight! The opening of a whole new world follows these "explosions". The older children use their ability with the moveable alphabet to compose lists around a theme, to explore compound words, homonyms, rhymes, contractions, to write stories about their experiences and poems inspired by these experiences, and to create reports and stories based on their readings and imagination. As stated earlier, everything in the environment is labeled with increasing precision - at first just nouns, then articles and nouns, then articles, adjectives and nouns. Sets of classified cards that have previously been used for vocabulary enrichment now have labels and control cards so the children can check themselves. Definition booklets offer children opportunities to further explore areas of interest.

Children's reading moves beyond phonetically spelled words to the study of phonograms (two letters together which produce a sound, such as sh, th, oo) and to what we call "puzzle words" (irregularly constructed words, such as to, one and of). The study of the functions of different words is great fun as the children use "the farm" to discover that adjectives help us to describe the animals (nouns). Each part of speech is introduced with an activity, such as tying objects together for conjunctions and placing items in different places for prepositions. They are presented in the same order that children naturally acquire language. Verbs become commands for action, which can then be modified with adverbs. Symbols are given to each part of speech, and with time the children are able to recognize and appreciate different styles of writing, such as an author's use of adjectives or action words. We write sentences for the children to act out and

then analyze. This increases in complexity with the child's interest and ability until he is diagramming sentences. A true love of reading and writing can be fostered through this progression.

The older children's work with the mathematical materials is moving from concrete experiences of quantity, symbol, and operations (addition and subtraction) to more abstract work. Beyond the sensorial experience of holding a unit bead or a thousand cube, a child can add, subtract, multiply and divide with small square tiles called "stamps." The stamps no longer need to demonstrate the sensorial impression of quantity, for the child has a clear feeling for these numbers. These stamps differ only by color and are imprinted with their quantity (" 1 ", "10", "100", "1000"). This work can be further abstracted to the "dot game," in which dots in certain columns now represent qualities, and to the small and large bead frames (abacus). Children practice mathematical operations with small strips and beads and charts, internalizing the process as well as beginning to log into their memory many of the essential combinations. They ultimately can test their memory with a blank chart upon which they place the answers to their equations. Children will count chains that are the cubes of numbers, work with the calendar, clock, weights and measurements. They explore the fraction insets, identifying quantities and substituting pieces while discovering equivalencies, as well as performing basic operations of addition and subtraction. Children use their understanding of the math materials to solve story problems, connected to real life activity, such as the number of houses still without power after a storm, the perimeter and area of our classroom, or how many crackers each child will receive if we share a large quantity equally. This continuum offers children a solid framework for further exploration of mathematical concepts.

Knowing now what is available to the older children in a Montessori Children's House, I encourage you to observe both at the Children's House and in a kindergarten class. While watching the older children, ask yourself these questions:

- In what activities are these children involved?
- What is the level of work of the older children?
- Do you notice interest, concentration, cooperation, joy in the children's work?
- How do these children interact with others?
- Do you see examples of leadership, confidence, responsibility, independence?

Then, talk with your child's guide regarding your child's specific needs and interests, and you will surely come to the decision best suited for your child. The final year in the Children's House is like running a marathon after years of training; it is the much-anticipated ending of a good book; it is harvesting the fruit of the garden. If you choose to keep your child in the Children's House, he will reap the benefits for many years to come.

Ann Messick worked for a total of 30 years at West Hills Montessori School and SunGarden Montessori Children's House, beginning as an assistant, treasuring her time as a guide, and completing her career as an administrator.

Inspiration from the Spring Tea Award Ceremony

The Outstanding Dedication Award

Nicholas Stocco introduces Maria Garcia for the Outstanding Dedication Award:

I am honored to be here today to help present the OMA Outstanding Dedication Award for Inspiring Advocacy in the Montessori Community to Maria Garcia.

It's my understanding the nomination committee was very impressed with the inspiration and creativity that Maria demonstrated through the many long hours she put in to help turn Alder Montessori from a dream into a reality. As well as how her dedication and strong belief in Montessori has contributed to the success of the program. I couldn't agree more.

I also know the same can be said about Carrie Brown, this year's recipient of the Susie Huston Award, about her amazing work with the Native Montessori Program. I suspect that both Maria and Carrie would rather that we not make such a big fuss, but I can't think of two people more deserving of being celebrated here today.

Have you ever been to the orchestra?

Imagine a cacophony of sounds - the buzz of the arriving audience and the musicians warming up and such. And in front of all that noise, the conductor walks on stage and settles in front of the podium.

Then, there is a moment, a magical moment, when the conductor makes a very small gesture. Something like this (raising hand). And suddenly, out of the chaos, order. Noise becomes music.

That's what I think about when I think about Maria.

She is a maestro,

Guiding a diverse group of children in an environment that respects the totality of each child's development, but also allows children to gain an awareness and appreciation of others, of the challenges faced by others, and equally importantly, of their own strengths and abilities to help others and affect the world around them.

Maria knows how to interpret the score. The depth of her knowledge surrounding human development seems immeasurable. She can see what is coming next and is able to emphasize different elements of the Montessori pedagogy as needed by each child and the community.

I'm reminded of a comment a visitor once made to me after her observation in our classroom. She said, "I've never seen a group of children so connected to their teacher. There is such a deep love between them." It is through this shared trust, respect, and love, similar to that shared by the

conductor and orchestra, which allows Maria, and the children of Alder, to create such beautiful music.

So, on behalf of all your colleagues at Alder and MNW, and everyone here today, I'd like to congratulate you, Maria, for receiving the OMA Outstanding Dedication Award for Inspiring Advocacy in the Montessori Community and say,

Brava, Maria, Brava!

From Maria Garcia Outstanding Dedication Award Recipient:

As I replied to Ms. Cotner upon her notification of this unexpected award, I am humbled and honored for this recognition by OMA.

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude. As you all know, all good work occurs due to the collaboration of people, and my case is no exception. For our work the past two years first I must extend my gratitude to Montessori Northwest, who gave us the opportunity to participate in the Alder Montessori project which I consider to be the pinnacle of my career.

Also I must express my gratitude to my two amazing assistants, Janet Dominguez and Mara Castro. Without their support and dedication, our current work would not have been possible.

I also want to mention the energy and encouragement we have received from the Montessori NW staff, the board of directors, student body, and program director Nick Stocco; driving forces which have sustained us through this time.

Also, my deepest expression of gratitude goes to Jennifer Davidson, whose vision to open the door to such a revolutionary program within a training center, has been a source of inspiration.

But, to all of you friends and colleagues, I want to bring forth the lineage that we all share when we dedicate our lives to work for the benefit of children. It is both a privilege and responsibility to set up an environment to nurture all areas of a developing being as they construct their physical, emotional, social and intellectual abilities, which will eventually sustain their individual lives.

And... we must never forget that the foundation of all that we do is based on the preparation of an environment where all the attributes of beauty, order, culture and respect come together in the expression of our "practices of life," by learning how to care for self, how to care for our surroundings, and how to relate to each other.

It is upon these pillars that we can build our own lives, and this is the inspiration of the Montessori lineage we all share and work so hard for.

Again, thank you; and may you all have long and wonderful careers in the highest endeavor of all: to work for the benefit of human beings.

Thank you.

A little bit about Alder Montessori:

Alder Montessori is a tuition free Montessori preschool serving families in poverty, made possible through a partnership between Montessori Northwest, Lewis & Clark Montessori Charter School, the Reynolds School District, and "I Have a Dream" Oregon. The program is located within Title 1 high poverty Alder Elementary School and is free for families living within the Alder enrollment boundaries. Funding is provided by MNW, RSD, and IHAD, with significant support from Preschool Promise, foundations, and private giving.

With Alder Montessori, the partners aim to widen the understanding of Montessori by bringing this revolutionary method of education to more children. Similar Montessori schools around the world have been able to achieve impressive outcomes, including gains in literacy, numeracy, and self-regulation needed for academic and lifetime success from early childhood onwards. These results go hand-in-hand with the work of our partners to empower students from low-income communities to thrive in school, college, and career.

[More about Alder Montessori.](#)

The Susie Huston Award

Karen Kitchen introduces Carrie Brown for the Susie Huston Award

It is interesting to note that the Indian Education Program was housed in this very building back in the late 1990s. (Referring to Sunstone Montessori School.)

We are here to acknowledge and celebrate the significant contributions that Carrie Brown has made to the Montessori community, to the Portland Public School's Native Montessori families, and the greater Native community in the Portland Metro area.

It was in the fall of 2014 that I met Carrie. Our PPS Indian Education program had partnered with Title I and the Early Childhood Department to re-establish the Native Montessori Pre-K Program. Our former NMP class had been forced to close due to budget cuts back in 2009. Initially I hired Carrie to provide consultation, staff trainings, and guidance to support correct implementation of Montessori practice and curriculum. She even served as a substitute teacher when needed. The range and quality of supports she provided during this first launch year were exceptional. Our team was thrilled when at the end of year 1, she applied for and was hired to be the lead teacher and guide for the classroom. Since taking the lead, Carrie has been instrumental in articulating the mission and vision of our Native Montessori program to parents, other district staff, and to the larger community.

She has participated in National Indian Education Association conferences and other culturally specific trainings to learn more about how the historic and contemporary factors, including

legislation and educational policies, impact the academic achievement and self-identity of our American Indian and Alaska Native students in public education.

Carrie has become a strong advocate for culturally relevant, authentic and respectful services for our families. Using her knowledge and with the compassion of a counselor, she helps families access both Native and non-Native social services to ensure wrap-around school and community support.

The NMP classroom is tribally diverse and Carrie is very intentional in her curriculum to recognize each child's unique tribal affiliation and cultural traditions. The sharing and celebration of tribal diversity goes beyond the classroom too, as Carrie has organized school-wide events for the Clarendon Early Learning Academy, so all children can learn new things about Native culture.

Carrie participates at local Native events, including powwows, and she respectfully represents her own Choctaw people, Portland Public Schools, the Indian Education program, and the Native Montessori Program. She enthusiastically recruits for all of these programs, and as such is a wonderful ambassador for both Montessori education and for Native education.

Carrie was nominated and selected to be an advisor to the Portland Art Museum's Education committee. Her love of and experience with art is evident in her classroom, and is showcased in the works created by her students.

Always thinking about how to enhance the education experience for her students, Carrie has tirelessly pursued and received financial assistance and donations. Examples include healthy snacks and foods for cooking lessons, bus tickets to assist families with getting to and from school each day, and galoshes and raincoats for every child.

Carrie understands that it is essential for Native students and families to be welcomed, to have our diverse tribal cultures validated, and to have ongoing opportunities to learn and practice traditional ways of doing and knowing. She understands the importance of developing positive relationships and building trust. She and her educational assistants, Heather and Ryoko, demonstrate teamwork, respect, independence, cooperation, kindness, compassion, appreciation, patience, humor, care of self, care for environment, care for community, love for the children and for each other. They have created a lovely setting with a relaxed atmosphere that shines a bright light on the beauty and artistry of Native themes and lifeways.

Carrie is a woman of strength, heart and mind. She is an exceptional teacher, colleague, and friend, and I am very happy that she is sharing her gifts with our little ones, with our families and communities, and our school district.

Now we could like to congratulate Carrie and show our appreciation in the Native way by gifting her with a Pendleton Blanket.

(Carrie was then presented with and wrapped in a beautiful Pendleton Blanket.)

From Carrie Brown

Susie Huston Award Recipient:

First I want to say thank you to all those that came before me.

I did not have the honor to have personally known Susie Huston, but I understand she had a joyful spirit, was a mentor to her community, and uplifted others. It is humbling to accept this award in her memory.

I am so grateful that since 2002 there has been a culturally responsive curriculum within a Montessori prepared environment that best supports our American Indian children and is so healing for the whole family. I want to thank the Portland Public Schools for supporting the Native Montessori Program and Joe Fontaine, Eileen Isham, Karen Kitchen, and Angie Merrill specifically and our whole Title 6 Indian Education Team. A very special thank you to Norrine Smokey-Smith who has tirelessly advocated on our behalf. I am so grateful that our program continues to receive support as we move to Faubion Elementary School.

I would not be standing here without the support of so many who have walked this journey with me. I have learned from my mistakes and have learned so much from the countless teachers I have worked with over the years. Thank you to Montessori Northwest and the Oregon Montessori Association for the support of workshops and the many opportunities for professional development.

And thank you for the small interactions that can mean so much. We just don't know how everything will come together in a big circle. Years ago, as an art student, I was working in the slide library and my supervisor had a magazine called "Holistic Education." In that magazine was an article about Montessori education which sparked my interest. I then met Terry Graham, with East Dallas Community School, and although she was busy she took the time to mentor me. That brief interaction has come full circle today. It is a blessing to support children and their families. Thank you so much for this honor.

It is an honor to be here and I want to thank the Oregon Montessori Association for all of their support and encouragement. I also want to say Congratulations to all of the MNW Graduates; you have a wonderful journey ahead of you. Congratulations and many blessings to Maria Garcia.

And, finally, my heartfelt gratitude to OMA for this honor. Thank You.

A little bit about Native Montessori:

More information on the history and revival of Native Montessori in David Ayer's article for Montessori Public: [Native Montessori Project Revived](#).