Wafford: Culture and literacy **Hassebroek:** Writing feedback **Germán:** Poetry and joy

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Montessori-first literacy at Cornerstone

Interventions grounded in human development

BY **LIESL TAYLOR** AND **DAVID AYER**

This is the story of how a public Montessori school committed to bringing high-fidelity Montessori to all children, regardless of background or socio-economic status, made dramatic changes in children's literacy while staying true to Montessori principles and practices which support optimal human development.

Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School is a public charter K-6 Montessori school serving a diverse and under-resourced population in St. Paul, Minnesota. The school was launched in 2011 after a group of dedicated parents, in connection with the Montessori Center of Minnesota (MCM), and with the support of the strong Montessori community in the Twin Cities, wrote a successful application for the charter. The school is the only AMI recognized public charter school in Minnesota.

Cornerstone was founded to meet a need for authentic Montessori elementary education on St. Paul's poverty-impacted east side. The founders knew that they would face significant implementation challenges from the beginning.

Funding was not available for children under five, so the charter school opened with five year-olds in two existing Children's Houses, and two lower elementary environments with six and seven year-olds. Budget, regulatory, and equity concerns required a start with children mostly without previous Montessori experience. Finally, the desired population of children came, rich in diversity, from a community impacted by poverty and trauma.

Initially, Cornerstone's leaders and guides didn't have a lot of information about the prior academic success of the children they would serve. But because of their experience in public Montessori, they knew there was a good chance that remedial work would be needed, especially in reading. "The Elementary curriculum is difficult to access without reading skills, expecting that children are 'reading to learn rather than learning to read,'" Taylor said. "We've been trained under certain assumptions, including a grounding in a rich early childhood experience."

Immersive literacy at Cornerstone

So before the children arrived, a plan was developed and put in place. From the beginning, Cornerstone took a very long view, which, fortunately, their charter authorizer, Volunteers of America (VOA) was willing to support, understanding that academic progress might take several years to manifest. The initial charter approval was for three years, and an additional five-year renewal was approved based on the success of the first years. This has given the school eight years of running room—"initial years to build community, and then six years to see the academic benefits reflected in a group of children with *longevity* in a Montessori program."

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Centering supportive language

Going deep into the power of words

BY **KOREN CLARK**

"Class, why don't we all have a seat in the circle?" This simple phrase holds so much meaning in a Montessori classroom. One child might say to themselves, "Yay, it's time to sit in the circle!" while another might say, "Who doesn't have a seat?" One child may hear this language as an open invitation to join the circle, while another child may resist or not perceive an invitation at all.

The language of a Montessori teacher is as powerful and potent as the silence. Both can swing the doors of self-actualization wide open, guiding children through our words and the spaces between our words. For example, "How did it feel to accomplish all of your work today?" gives the child the space to reflect, feel, and choose their reactions to their work, without our decreeing "good job," before they get a chance to understand what they have done.

So what causes two different children to hear totally different things from the same simple phrase? It's important to understand that although all of your students may be seated in a 360 degree circle on your classroom rug, the language you are centering resonates differently for each child. The children experience what they hear from different angles. The Montessori pie, like the American pie, is not cut equally for everyone. It becomes our responsibility as educators to create equity by studying the impact and the intent of the language spoken in our classroom.

Who our children are, what their background is, how they are spoken to at home, and the messages they receive from society need to be studied if we are going to serve our students with the true beauty of an authentic Montessori education. From television, social media and their communities, children learn who is considered valuable and who is not.

As children enter into their new classrooms this fall, within seconds they

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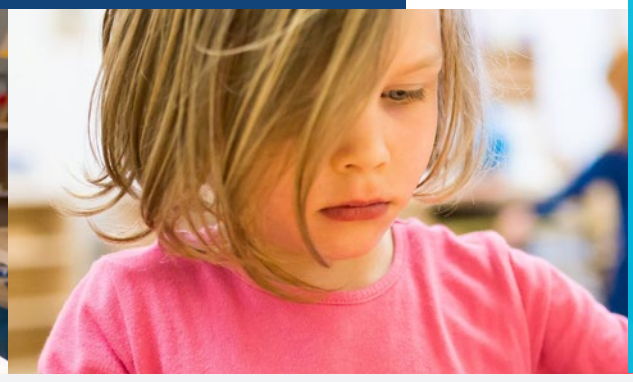

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Culturally responsive literacy

Deep literacy needs to take culture into account

BY **MAATI WAFFORD**

My educational journey has taken me from early experiences in essentially segregated schools in the South, through the nurturing spaces of two historically Black universities, to being a Montessori lower elementary teacher and Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at an independent school. This journey has challenged me to reflect on the importance of deeply considering culture—our own as teachers, and that of the students in our classrooms—particularly when it comes to literacy.

As with all humans, my education began first in the womb. The sounds, smells, and external sensations experienced by my mother gave me a suggestion of what was to come. My very young parents raised me at first in public housing. My most vivid experiences of home include listening attentively to lessons on Saturday mornings at the Farmer's Market with my grandmother: How good the turnip greens were this season, how to identify good homegrown tomatoes for Sunday's dinner. I was enthralled by the stories I heard as a child in a family of storytellers. I reveled in the natural cadence that piqued the interest of the listeners, and the humorous and sometimes tragic endings that served as a backdrop to lessons I would learn as I matured.

School, on the other hand, was a peculiar institution. I was a quiet, shy, and deeply inquisitive child. I loved school in that I loved to soak up my surroundings and was always told that education was important and school was the best place to learn. However, what I learned and how I experienced school left me conflicted and at times at odds with my desire for understanding.

I was enthralled by the stories I heard as a child in a family of storytellers

One striking memory from those early years was being bused to school. The bus came into our inner-city Nashville neighborhood, and took a bumpy 45-minute ride past neighborhood schools out to the suburbs. I clearly remember seeing the differences in student make-up and resource allocation in that suburban school. Many of us bused-in kids were blatantly singled out. This wasn't just on the playground and in the cafeteria, in interactions amongst kids, but also enacted by teachers and administrators. I can recall so many perceptions from elementary school and remarks from seemingly well-intentioned teachers—suffice it to say, bias is what I remember most.

Bias is a manifestation of systemic racism that harms us all. Its burden both literally and figuratively sat in my chest as I matriculated through several schools, and greatly influenced my decision to study psychology and social work in college. I entered Montessori training with a strong and deeply personal understanding of the need for social justice and equity in our schools.

Surprisingly, the training also created space for a profound revelatory experience. Why were tears welling up in my eyes as I learned how to exchange with the bead material? *Wait, that's what is happening when we divide? Wow! I had*

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In this issue: Montessori and literacy

This issue of *MontessoriPublic* presents a range of perspectives and stories on Montessori and literacy, as well as Montessori news and developments and reports on NCMPS projects.

Koren Clark, an educational consultant at the Wildflower Foundation, digs into the power of language to shape children's experiences.

Rachael Gabriel, a professor of Literacy Education at the University of Connecticut, reviews the state of the "literacy wars" in education outside of Montessori.

Roberto and Lorena Germán, co-founders of The Multicultural Classroom, share a story of unlocking children's expressive language through poetry.

Sarah Hassebroek, a Montessori education professor at St. Catherine's University, connects research on teaching writing with Montessori practices.

Jeremy Sawyer, a postdoctoral fellow at Temple University, talks with MontessoriPublic about literacy research and Montessori lessons.

Liesl Taylor, Director of Elementary Pedagogy at Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School, tells her school's story of improving literacy while maintaining Montessori fidelity.

Maati Wafford, Race and Equity advisor for NCMPS and Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Barrie Institute, makes deep connections between literacy and culture.


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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE OF MONTESSORIPUBLIC:

Jeff Bezos pledges billions. But what does it mean for Montessori?

Angeline Lillard wins a $3 million federal grant to study public Montessori.

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Article submission deadline **January 16, 2019**. More guidelines on page 23.

Montessori and "playful learning"

Recent literacy research lines up well with Montessori practice

BY **JEREMY SAWYER**
AND **DAVID AYER**

Jeremy Sawyer is a postdoctoral fellow working with Dr. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek at Temple University on the Philadelphia Playful Learning City project. MontessoriPublic was interested in what current research has to say about early childhood literacy, and Sawyer agreed to do an email interview. The following conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity.

MP: *Tell us a little bit about yourself and your work.*

JS: In our work, we aim to transform urban public spaces like bus stops, streets, and parks to encourage playful learning and meaningful communication between children and caregivers. Before I got my PhD in developmental psychology, I worked as a bilingual (Spanish/English) school psychologist in a NYC public elementary school. Building on that experience, I also study how play, private speech (self-talk), and bilingualism contribute to children's thinking abilities and their motivation.

MP: *Playful learning, meaningful communication between children and adults, and self-talk—it sounds like there's a lot in common with the Montessori approach to early childhood literacy! Maybe you can start by orienting us a little to what is considered "well-established" in your field under those headings?*

JS: Absolutely. We have strong and growing evidence that playful learning—when kids play and learn at the same time—is how young children learn best. While children learn through the spontaneous creativity and exploration involved in unconstrained free play, research indicates that they often learn more effectively through what is called *guided* play. In guided play a teacher has a goal in mind (for instance, to learn what makes a triangle), and guides children to playfully engage with triangles to discover their rules. So teachers and children might put on detective hats and try to figure out the "secrets of the shapes," investigating a variety of triangles to see what properties they share in common. Numerous studies have shown guided play to be better than direct instruction or pure free play for learning.

MP: *It's kind of remarkable that you've chosen that example! In the Montessori language work for three to six year-olds, we have an activity called "The Detective Adjective Game." In the exercise, the child already knows the properties of triangles from previous work. There is a box of triangles of various shapes, colors, and sizes, and the teacher writes a description of a triangle to be identified, progressively adding more descriptive words and eliminating triangles that don't match. So something like this:*

"The triangle" ("Oh, not the triangle I was thinking of—we need another word here.")

"The blue triangle" ("Oh, still not the triangle I was thinking of—we need another word," taking out all the non-blue triangles)

"The large blue triangle: ("Oh, still not the triangle...)

and on down to (perhaps) "The large blue right-angled scalene triangle", at which point there is only one left. Children can also do the work independently with prepared slips.

It's just as you describe: guided, playful (albeit without the detective hats), content-directed, etc.

Developmental psychology emphasizes how fascinated children are by adult activities and the "real world"

JS: Learning science and its practical application have also established that playful learning is optimized when it is fun, active, engaging, socially interactive, and meaningful to the child's life and cultural background. We know that conversations between parents and children about everyday items like those in the grocery store, or conversations with teachers and peers about field trips (e.g., to the local fire station) help to grow children's language abilities because they build on familiar experiences that have meaning in children's lives.

MP: *The Montessori analogue here is called "Telling True Stories." This is just an activity where the adult gathers a group of children and tells a simple true story about something that happened: "Yesterday, on my way home from school, I stopped at the grocery store to buy ingredients for soup. While I was there..." This might be followed by the "Question Game," in which the adult asks the children questions about the story: "Who is it that went to the store?" "What did I buy at the store?" "When did I stop at the store?" etc.*

Playful learning works best when it is fun, active, engaging, socially interactive, and meaningful to the child's life and cultural background

JS: Finally, self-talk comes in as children learn from these meaningful conversations with adults and then begin to speak to themselves in similar ways. Children can "think out loud," ask themselves questions, and direct their own attention by speaking aloud to themselves. For instance, a child solving a puzzle might say, "Hm… what piece do I need next? This looks like a red barn here, so let's look for a red piece. Nope not there… here it is!" Just as they collaborate and reason with adults using speech, they can now use speech as a tool to think and solve problems on their own. It is as if they turn to themselves as a collaborative partner when problem solving. We have good evidence that self-talk can improve children's performance and help them regulate their attention and emotions while taking on challenging activities.

MP: *This, too, finds a place in the Montessori classroom—we are quite careful about how and when we use words while presenting a lesson, and typically don't "talk and do at the same time" to isolate the stimulus. But we're mindful of the child's natural drive to imitate, and we will often hear children repeating our language in their independent work: "Now we're going to count the units! One unit, two units, three units..."*

What do you think of those activities? How do they resonate with what you know about language development?

JS: The examples you gave resonate not only what we know about language development, but also the way that children develop conceptual thinking. Lev Vygotsky, the Russian developmental psychologist, conducted studies with children very similar to the "Detective Adjective Game" that you described. He found that as children used different categories to classify shapes (e. g., "yellow" "small" "four-sided"), they developed more advanced concepts about geometrical forms, and improved their logical reasoning skills. Furthermore, they came to understand how to better use *language itself* as a tool for classifying objects, actions, and for thinking about the world.

MP: *Yes, the Vygotsky–Montessori connection has a lot of potential for exploration. That idea about categories maps directly onto Montessori Children's House "Classified Reading", which begins with oral activities ("Let's play a game where we take turns naming animals"), and moves to oral activities with picture cards in various classifications ("Can you bring me the excavator? Which one is the front-end loader?) and reading/writing activities where the child is already familiar with the vocabulary.*

JS: I was also really struck by the "Telling True Stories" activity you mentioned. There is some recent work in developmental psychology that emphasizes just how fascinated children are by adult activities and the "real world." Before, it

was often assumed that children were far more interested in fiction and make-believe than real events in the world around them. But now we know that children are highly motivated to learn about their communities, their culture, and the everyday experiences of other children and adults. Children want to learn about and "grow into" adult roles, and I can imagine that they are highly engaged in listening, questioning, and sharing everyday experiences. This is great for their growing language skills, as well as their social and cognitive development.

MP: *As you may know, Montessori is notable (some might say notorious) for emphasizing reality over fantasy for young children. So, no fairy tales or stories about pigs in aprons for the birth to six age group, when what they really want to hear about is how the farmer grows food or how tadpoles become frogs. We also emphasize supporting children's drives to adapt to the culture of the adults around them which, if it's done with awareness and open-mindedness, goes along way towards the idea that Montessori is inherently inclusive.*

JS: Yes, and that's very interesting what you said about not "talking and doing" at the same time. As you mentioned, children will naturally imitate and pick up the language that adults use to describe the world around them. And several studies now suggest that using number and spatial words (e.g., "up" "under" "around") while counting, playing with shapes, or block building can enhance children's early STEM skills. However, I can see the value in isolating the nonverbal aspects of a stimulus when introducing an activity to children, and allowing them to initially experience it in a more visual or physical way. This strikes me as a unique and innovative aspect of Montessori education which lays the foundation for children to make their own connection to the activity later through language.

MP: *Indeed—it's not that we never use number and spatial words. I'd love to show you what we do with prepositions, for example, or share with you when we use the phrase, "And when we put numbers together to get a bigger number, that's called addition!" But we're running out of time and space here. Before we leave, though, I'd like to ask you one more question this has raised for me. With the parallels between Montessori practice and literacy research we've uncovered in just this short conversation, which were certainly news to me, I wonder how we can expand and deepen this connection. How can we promote more of these conversations between Montessorians and academics such as yourself, to build more of these cross connections?*

JS: That's a great question, David, and I really appreciate you reaching out to start this conversation. I've learned more about the Montessorian approach through talking with you, and I appreciate the vivid examples you offered from Montessori classrooms. As academics, we often drift into talking mostly to other academics, but as you said we can learn so much from dialogues like these. I think it would be great to expand these conversations, taking up the connection between Montessori and Vygotsky, and other questions. Forums with Montessori practitioners and academics would be a great step, as well as publishing conversations like these. Thanks for the work you're doing, and let's keep trying to expand the cross-talk and build our networks.

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NATIONAL CENTER for MONTESSORI in the PUBLIC SECTOR

"Balanced literacy" and the reading wars

The phonics vs. whole language rages on in conventional education

BY **RACHAEL GABRIEL**

This article is reprinted with the author's permission from the Washington Post

We are seeing new articles in the media saying that American elementary school educators don't understand the science of how to teach kids how to read — and even if they do, some resist it.

These reports then suggest that a return to explicit phonics instruction and the dismissal of other approaches is the only valid response to scientific research. Though pendulum swings between phonics- or basic-skills-focused instruction and meaning-focused instruction have been ongoing for decades, this round of debates has set up a new straw man, Balanced Literacy.

Unfortunately, what these reports get wrong about Balanced Literacy demonstrates exactly the kind of thinking that limits opportunities to develop literacy for all children. Many students aren't being taught to read because of the same misconceptions perpetuated by articles that have recently raised the alarm about current methods of teaching reading and identifying reading disabilities such as dyslexia.

There is a wide divide between political debates about the teaching of reading and the actual instruction students receive in classrooms. The sloppy, mudslinging nature of these debates has led to confusion, distrust and a tribe-like affiliation with single approaches among practitioners, researchers and policymakers.

There is resistance to reading mandates in both directions. "Scientific research"—sometimes the very same studies—is used to argue both sides. Philosophical differences are frequently acknowledged, but rarely understood. Like different denominations of a single religion, different approaches to reading instruction often have significant assumptions in common, but some core disagreements that each believes is the fatal flaw of the other and the reason to dismiss it completely.

Distrust and misinformation on both sides perpetuate dramatic pendulum swings back and forth between contrasting approaches. These rob educators of the continuity needed to master and innovate in any direction, and eliminate the possibility of meaningful integration of ideas.

Teachers are sometimes painted as being recalcitrant and/or ignorant workers within failing public institutions that ignore or are ignorant of research. Whether or not every elementary educator and leader is engaged with research from the full range of disciplines relevant to literacy, these caricatures do more to limit educators' potential to improve than they do to shed light on their areas for improvement. They set up a false either-or binary that makes everything schools do "bad" and everything (some) scientists and advocates want them to do "good."

Here are a few things news stories tend to get wrong:

Balanced Literacy is not "a little bit of phonics." It's not "whole language under a new name."'

It's also not a good description for what goes on in most classrooms I've visited over the past decade, including those that claim to use a Balanced Literacy approach (and many do not). Much has been written online about Balanced Literacy by many partially informed bloggers. Whoever recently edited the Wikipedia page for it clearly didn't read the texts they reference, and either made things up, or reported based on limited experience for most of the page. Originally, Balanced Literacy was intended to "balance" several aspects of instruction which scientific research highlighted as important, but in tension: reading and writing (instead of focusing heavily on reading at the expense of writing); teacher-directed and student-centered activities (instead of being totally student-led inquiry, or complete teacher-directed explicit instruction); whole group, small group and independent configurations (instead of all one or another), and skill-focused (e.g. phonics) and meaning-focused (e.g. comprehension) instruction.

Each of these things are important: reading, writing, teacher direction, student inquiry, etc. None of these things should cancel out any of the others. But holding them in balance within a 90-minute period is challenging. Teaching a range of skills (for decoding and spelling) and strategies (for meaning-making), in a range of formats (whole group, small group and one-to-one), using a range of practices (read-alouds, shared reading, interactive reading, word work, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, shared writing, independent writing) is not only time-consuming but also requires tremendous skill in planning, execution, assessment and reflection from a knowledgeable, responsive teacher every single day.

"Scientific research"—sometimes the very same studies—is used to argue both sides

So, most of the time, even when I see "balanced literacy" on a glossy poster in a classroom, I don't see those things held in balance in real time. Sometimes what emerges is responsive to students and of great value. Sometimes what emerges is a mishmash of practices that do not fulfill original intentions or meet minimum standards. Depending on your philosophical orientation, you might swing right and say: more structure, more scripting, more focus will improve instruction. You might instead swing to the left and say: more knowledge, more freedom, and more flexibility will improve instruction. We can all agree we do not want to stay in a place where instructional quality is so variable and therefore inequitable.

To be clear: there are schools that do "a little bit of phonics" or no phonics, or such confused phonics that they may as well not have tried. There are also schools that do 20-45 minutes of high-quality explicit, systematic phonics instruction in regular classroom and intervention settings. There are even schools that do a whole period of phonics and spelling that is separate from other class periods of reading and/or writing throughout the day.

Poor instruction, jumbled instruction and unbalanced instruction do not occur because of Balanced Literacy, schools of education or the vestiges of a whole-language movement. Poor, jumbled and unbalanced instruction is just as likely to exist in settings where explicit, systematic phonics instruction is mandated in schools and teacher preparation programs.

Instead of arming educators with tools to manage the complexity of literacy learning, we put them in the middle of a political, philosophical conflict with religious overtones. We first tell them there is one right way. Then, 10-15 years later, we tell them they're getting new materials, schedules, expectations and "professional development" because something else is the one right way. Some individual educators braid together coherent understandings in the midst of volatility. Others do not.

Schools do not categorically ignore "scientific research."

As recent reports are quick to point out, the 2001 report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) should have been a good place to start conversations about scientifically-based reading research (SBRR) across U.S. schools. But what is less often discussed is that the 449-page report was summarized into a 34-page brochure that contained a fistful of claims that directly contradicted the full report. Most of the summary is devoted to findings related to phonics instruction — not because that was the focus of the NRP, but because it opened a new market for phonics-related educational materials and assessments. Free copies of the summary (not the full report) were mailed to every district and town. The effort to let the scientific research rule in 2001 was stymied by the publication of the error-laden summary. Now, anyone who claims the NRP report clearly held up a systematic-phonics-only approach clearly didn't read the report or the many commentaries that came after it.

In much the same way that people with contrasting perspectives on social issues both cite the same religious texts as evidence, advocates for meaning-focused, inquiry in literacy and advocates for skills-focused direct instruction in literacy both routinely reference the NRP findings as evidence for their positions. There are findings in the full report that can be used to support a range of approaches.

Still, under the 2002 federal No Child Left Behind Act, schools were required to use SBRR for instruction and intervention, as defined by the federal government. In fact, as a nation, we tried mandating strict adherence to SBRR over time on a large scale. That experiment in mandating SBRR for schools that received extra federal funding was called Reading First. It failed — not because it is impossible to make such methods work (and it did work well in some places), but because they do not work for all children, all the time, in all settings and therefore, on average, they fail.

District- or statewide implementation of a Balanced Literacy approach will also fail on average because different learners require different pathways to reading proficiency and implementation of research-based ideas will always vary in practice. There is scientific evidence for the components of a Balanced Literacy approach, and there is scientific evidence for the need for more explicit and systematic instruction of phonics and phonemic awareness.

However, just as the NRP predicted, the most robust effect sizes across settings that exist in scientific research come from studies of programs that are multifaceted *rather than narrow* in their approach, regardless of the theoretical orientation.

Multifaceted means that while targeting reading for the most vulnerable students, these approaches make explicit use of research on: writing and its reciprocity with reading; motivation and affect, and their impact on cognition; comprehension strategy instruction and the benefit of practice with continuous, connected texts that are interesting and meaningful. The best evidence points toward approaches that attend to multiple pathways for learning.

U.S. public schools are not monolithic

There is no way to describe how U.S. schools teach reading on average, in general or in most places. Significant differences in the execution of reading programs exist between classrooms, schools and districts even in the most standardized states.

Teachers working next door to one other, using the same materials, in the same setting, often have differences in the nature of their instruction, use of time, and engagement with evidence-based practices. The idea that public schools are systematically minimizing or limiting phonics instruction is simply untrue. The idea that most places have embraced a whole language-inspired "balanced" approach is simply untrue.

That isn't to say that some schools and classrooms haven't tried to do these things, but it is to reject the premise that a single philosophy has ever successfully spread across the land. In fact, "scientific research" has convincingly demonstrated when it comes to areas plagued by a pattern of contradictory reforms, individual teachers tend to "hug the middle" doing some of everything and a pure or extreme version of nothing "on average" and "in general."

Given this, it's counterproductive to deepen suspicion and disdain for public schools at a time when their work is more vital than ever to the health of our democracy and the promise of equality. And, it is irresponsible to represent the science of reading as completely settled and schools as effectively ignoring it. The sheer volume of ongoing neuroscience, cognitive science and social science research on literacy development is evidence that there is more to learn and explore when it comes to teaching all students to read.

No matter whose voices are loudest in any given decade, scientific research has consistently shown that:

- All children's minds meet the task of learning to read a little bit differently. For example, some scientists estimate up to four different subtypes of dyslexia, rather than one as once assumed. Conclusion: One philosophical orientation toward reading instruction is never going to work in all U.S. public schools no matter whose idea it was. Students learn differently and the sources of potential difficulty are varied.
- There are differences in experiences and outcomes related to reading and writing based on gender, race, language history, disability status and socioeconomic factors. These often appear before formal instruction has begun, and widen after. Conclusion: The question of how literacy is taught has everything to do with race, class, culture and identity, and any reporting or reform that ignores this is missing or misrepresenting reality.
- Ultimately, our failure to teach all students to read is a failure of our ability to improve instruction that starts with well-researched ideas, and is molded by professional educators into individualized pathways to a common outcome: powerful literacies. Conclusion: We should be more focused on improving instruction than disproving philosophy.

Contrasting approaches are rarely explored with genuine curiosity as starting points for rigorous improvement based on practice-generated evidence of effectiveness (e.g., in classrooms rather than in lab settings). They are religions unto themselves, complete with leaders, deities, catchphrases, measures of fidelity, branded tote bags and pledges of allegiance that blind people to the pitfalls and possibilities each one carries. The leaders of one routinely dismiss the ideas of the other, and their followers follow suit, often without a full understanding of that which they dismiss. This won't go away with the next pendulum swing.

So, before we take the usual "ready, fire, aim" approach and swing back toward phonics-focused instruction, let's not assume any one approach has the monopoly on authoritative research. Let's not just sound the alarm when we notice students struggling, but actually build in some improvements when whatever path we're on leaves some students behind.

The question we should be asking in investigative reports, board meetings and individual classrooms is not, "Have we gone the wrong way?" The questions should be: "What is working here, when and for whom, and what can we improve?" Or at the very least: "As we go this way, who becomes vulnerable, and how do we support them?"

Shaming and blaming public schools for how they have attempted to manage the complex and sacred task of teaching reading will make the swing back toward phonics so rigid, narrow and self-righteous that it will certainly fail and come bounding back toward more holistic approaches with all their pitfalls and possibilities in a decade.

Instead of raising an alarm about current practices and running in the opposite direction, we should follow educators and neuroscientists who are genuinely curious about the complexity of literacy and of individuals. For example:

- Leaders who are thoughtfully experimenting with the possibilities of matching individual readers with individualized supports, regardless of who came up with them
- Leaders who understand the structures, pressures and realities of classrooms in different settings
- Leaders who are more invested in starting with sound scientific ideas, and improving rapidly and nimbly than being right and proving everyone else wrong
- Leaders who learn from the failures and excesses of the past and work to change the very thinking and tools that failed in the first place.

It is time to change the thinking from rigid "either-or choices" in literacy instruction to responsive "yes-ands" that engage children's unique pathways to literacy.

We can have classrooms with explicit phonics instruction and engagement with literatures that sustain the cultures and identities of our students. We can teach reading and writing, and let one support the other.

We can plan for motivation, engagement, identity development and rigorous skill development in the same lesson. We can build classrooms that teach all students to read, but not if we miss opportunities to learn from current practices before running in the other direction.

Rachael Gabriel is an Associate Professor of Literacy Education at the University of Connecticut.

Montessori documentary premieres this fall

A five-year journey comes to completion

BY **DAVID AYER**

This article was reprinted from MontessoriPublic.org.

More than seven years ago Montessori parents Vina Kay and Jan Selby began working on the concept behind Building the Pink Tower, an independent documentary film about Montessori education. (Vina is the Executive Director at Voices for Racial Justice, a Minnesota nonprofit, and Jan is an award-winning director at Quiet Island Films.) MontessoriPublic has been following their story since 2016, as the project has moved slowly but surely to completion, taking twists and turns along the way. In fact, back in 2016, Jan likened the development of the film to observing a young child in a Montessori classroom: you don't always know which way the story will go, but you can be certain it will hold your interest.

Now the finished film—retitled "Inside Montessori"—is ready for its debut, premiering at the International Montessori Conference in Sarasota, Florida on November 8 and the first ever AMI affiliate conference (AMI/USA, EAA, MAA and NAMTA) in Dallas on November 9. I've had a chance to preview a rough cut of parts of the film.

The main body of the film (the part I previewed) comprises five stories from Montessori schools around the country: four public programs including three charters and one district school, and one independent school. The schools are presented in order of ages served and span the developmental continuum from birth through eighteen years.

Lumin Education

Lumin Education with the motto "Start Young—Involve Parents", is a flagship program bringing Montessori early childhood education continuing through third grade since 1978 to a largely immigrant population in east Dallas, Texas. The "Inside Montessori" story focuses on Montessori's view of the needs and characteristics of children from birth to three, and the work Lumin does in home visits with new parents to support their children's development.

Montessori Partners Serving All Children

The second segment focuses on Montessori Partners Serving All Children, an initiative of the Montessori Center of Minnesota (an AMI training center in St. Paul, Minnesota) which works with civic partners to support programs serving indigenous, immigrant, and disadvantaged communities in the Twin Cities area. The film highlights Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School, a public charter which has notable success raising achievement levels of low-income students above those reached in the surrounding district.

City Garden Montessori School

Montessori elementary is represented by City Garden in St. Louis, Missouri, an intentionally diverse, "Anti-Bias Anti-Racism" focused school which recently had its charter extended for an unprecedented ten years by the state school board. Interviews with teachers and classroom footage demonstrate City Garden's integration of Montessori elementary pedagogy with their deep commitment to social justice.

Lake Country School

At Lake Country in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the only independent school in the film, middle school is represented with an implementation of Montessori's Erdkinder model adapted to an urban setting. The experiential aspects are embodied in an annual "Odyssey" trip at the beginning of each year and an (optional) 18-day stay on their rural "Land School" campus in Dunn County, Wisconsin offered to middle school students every year.

MacDowell Montessori School

Finally, the film wraps up with a visit to the high school program at MacDowell, part of Milwaukee Public Schools' public Montessori network—the largest in the U.S. Moving interviews with parents and high school students demonstrate the impact of extended exposure to the child-centered Montessori approach, setting adolescents students up for success beyond high school.

What it's about

The content and focus of the film have developed over the last five years, a period in which a lot has happened in the Montessori world as well. Public Montessori has grown in importance and cultural currency, with more than two dozen new programs opening over the period. The film was always intended to expand access to the model, but I think it's fair to say that the public focus has sharpened as the project developed. Much of the high production video of Montessori out in the world has been promotional material from private schools, inevitably representing their demographics and physical environments.

Social justice has seen a rise in cultural awareness, both within and beyond the Montessori world. (The first Montessori for Social Justice Conference took place in 2013, the birth of what is now a national organization.) Social justice was always central to the film's creators—co-producer Vina Kay's day job is executive director at Voices for Racial Justice, a Minnesota nonprofit. In the current version, the emphasis on the power of Montessori to transform lives it has not yet reached is undeniable. "Montessori can be an equalizer," co-producer Jan Selby told me. "At the foundation, we believe all children should have access to quality education."

The Montessori Premieres

After years of work and several rounds of fundraising, the film is (almost) ready to launch. It will premiere over the weekend of November 8th and 9th, first at the International Montessori Council's Annual Conference in Sarasota, and then at the AMI Affiliates public Montessori oriented conference in Dallas. The film will be released on DVD and with streaming links in January, distributed as a premium to early sponsors and available as an to "early-bird" screening kit for $500, for a two month exclusive window. Often, this kind of arrangement comes with the option to show the film just once. But since the goal is for the widest possible exposure, recipients are encouraged to organize events and screenings of their own during this period. After the exclusive window, the film will be available for $250.

The five individual stories will also be available as stand-alone 15-minute films, and a library of shorter pieces is in development. A "public broadcasting friendly" 54-minute cut will be produced, as well as "mini-shorts" for promotion via social media. "We want to get this in front of as many people as possible," Selby said. "We're committed to having this be a very powerful tool for the Montessori world, because we want more people to understand what is so amazing about it."

David Ayer is the Communications Director for NCMPS.

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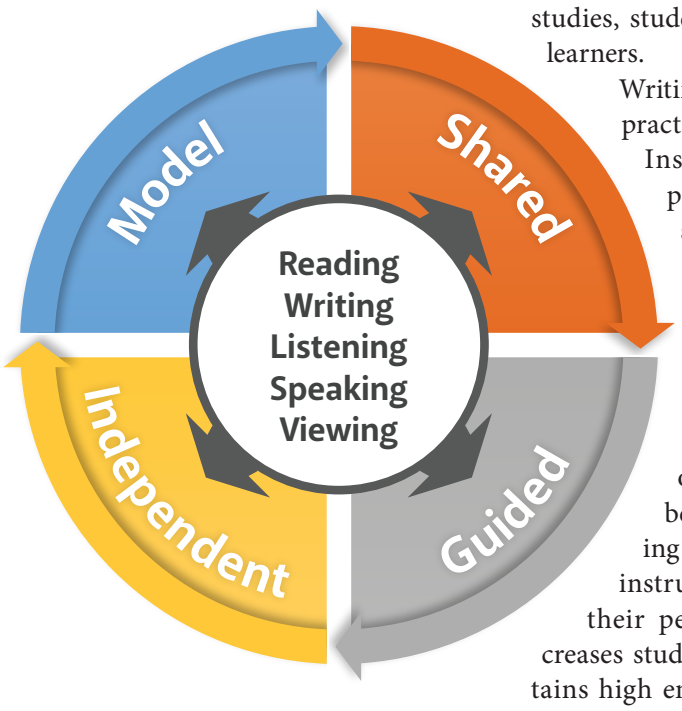
Writing: Building on Montessori with research

Balanced literacy, and supportive feedback in the student conference

BY **SARAH HASSEBROEK**

Writing is a part of our everyday lives. We communicate with those around us through writing, whether it be emails or texts. It is a valued form of communication that employers seek from their employees, and yet teachers continue to strive to teach writing effectively. Middle school, high school, and college educators bemoan the writing skills of their students. So why does writing seem so hard?

My writing education focused on grammar and rote journal entries. *(Remember DOL?)* Lessons on how to write a clear thesis with supporting details either were not taught or did not stick in my long-term memory. In addition to this, a writing curriculum was not covered in my Montessori training. Therefore, I relied on my experiences and external sources to improve my personal writing skills, and build lessons for my elementary students.



Historically, writing was not widely taught until the early 20th century, so it is not surprising that we continue to adapt and modify teaching methods for writing. It is an activity that requires sustained attention to the details of the structure of a story or report. The attitudes from both the student and teacher influence the motivation to sustain attention to the writing task. How do we increase motivation, and therefore increase the capabilities of our young writers? It begins by looking inward to our own attitudes and capabilities towards writing. Then, building an understanding of how to implement a Balanced Literacy Model in the classroom, and allow time for the students, of *all* ages, to meaningfully apply the skills learned through independent writing. Finally, we confer or coach the students with a focus on the writing *process* rather than the *product*. Dr. Montessori's lessons in grammar and other areas provide a footprint for us to follow. Continually building on prior knowledge, and giving individual support, while providing freedom of choice, I believe, leads to motivated writers and teachers!

Focus on balanced literacy

Student motivation is built through *clear directions*, followed by *guided practice*, ending in *application to individual independent work*. Through this cycle, students are able to make meaning of the instruction, building the students' engagement and belief that they are writers. This mirrors the Montessori work cycle as well. Through clear lessons, and guided and independent studies, students become independent learners.

Writing is frequently taught and practiced in isolated segments. Instead, an integrated approach strengthens understanding. By providing an instructional model that mirrors Montessori, students can apply the skills they have to the writing cycle. We must maintain an emphasis on the work of the child. Children must be given independent writing time to make sense of the instruction and apply skills to their personal writing. This increases student motivation and maintains high engagement in the writing process. This guided approach is especially supportive of our English Learners and low language learners.

Focus on the process, not the product

We are born storytellers. Beginning in Children's House classrooms, children can able to put their ideas on paper.

Writing can be a collaborative process

This can be through drawings, the first sounds of words, and even full sentences and paragraphs. It is important for educators to begin with an understanding of the child's skills and then meet their individual needs. Along the way, children learn how to edit, add details, and improve their skills. However, the focus is not on finishing every single story that is written. Not all stories are published by professional writers, and our students should not be held to a higher standard. Focus on building the student's writing skills, with a goal to publish one story every three to four weeks.

Focus on positive, supportive, academic feedback

A recent double-blind study found that African-American students who received specific, positive feedback, with assurance that they would be supported by the teacher to improve were more likely to improve the quality of their work. The effects of this specific feedback improved students' trust in schools and improved their academics beyond this writing assignment. The strategy to offer feedback that is specific to the student, with high assurance that the teacher will support the student is not a revolutionary change to our work as Montessori teachers. It is a reminder to build relationships with students, and support their growth with positive feedback and sharing your belief that the child can succeed.

Students of all ages show growth when they receive positive and specific academic feedback, for example, "Last week you made a goal to add more details to your story—I see you have added interesting details here." (This too aligns with guidance from Montessori.) This is specifically true for students of color. In several studies, students of color who indicated that their teachers knew them well showed an increase in motivation and higher achievement in the long term. Students with higher motivation are more willing to take risks and have increased performance of developing writers.

Guidelines for student conferences

- Reflect before you meet with a student
- Make at least one goal to move the child's work forward
- Provide a goal that is a stretch for the student, meaning something that the student will be challenged to complete.

In the following scenario, I had a goal for the student to work on his introduction:

Teacher: "Remember how you began your story last time? You began with an exciting event that occurred for your characters. That hooked your readers and we wanted to keep reading. How would you like to begin your story today?"

Student: "This time, I want to begin with a flash forward, with something that will happen later in the story. I like stories that begin like that, and I want to try writing a story like that."

In this scenario, the student took my prompt, and made it more specific to

his work. This doesn't always happen! Sometimes students need more guidance, but by entering our conferring session with an open goal, this self-motivated student was able to keep moving forward, rather than having to conform to my writing task, thus lowering motivation and engagement in the process. By including the student in the goal-setting process, he was able to independently pick a goal that was more challenging than what I would have given.

Making time

It is time to ditch the prescribed daily journal, and instead devote time to allowing students to independently build their own ideas. This level of creativity leads to improved writing skills in all areas. When students are stuck on ideas, allow them to bring pictures to school and use their lives as inspiration for stories. After all, what do they know better than themselves? You can also cut out pictures from magazines, such as animals, or other characters for reluctant or stumped writers.

Next steps

As a team in your building, reflect on how you approach writing.

- Do you rely on journal prompts?
- Do you give equal importance to modeling, guided, shared, and independent work?
- How do you support students during independent writing? What types of questions do you ask when conferring or coaching individuals?
- How do you maintain positive and supportive coaching to increase student motivation?

I encourage your team to come together and work to apply the principles of Montessori to the writing process!

Sarah Hassebroek earned her MAED from St. Catherine University and Ed.S from the University of Iowa. She is currently an Assistant Professor at St. Kate's in the Montessori Program and an Instructional Coach for the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Bezos' billions for Montessori (inspired)

Amazon's CEO has made a massive but mysterious pledge

BY **DAVID AYER**

This article was reprinted and updated from MontessoriPublic.org

As most of the Montessori world, and a good chunk of the rest of the world, knows by now, Amazon founding CEO and multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos announced what appears to be a major philanthropic initiative on Twitter this week. Bezos' "Day One Fund" consist of two projects: the Day 1 Families Fund, which will fund *"existing non-profits that help homeless families,"* and the Day 1 Academies Fund, which will create *"a network of new, non-profit, tier-one preschools in low-income communities,"* or "*launch and operate a network of high-quality, full-scholarship, Montessori-inspired preschools in underserved communities,*" which are two not-quite-the-same descriptions from the announcement.

There's been quite a lot of parsing of this announcement, since it came out as a surprise to the Montessori and philanthropic communities without any additional information, so let's try to break down what it says, what it doesn't, and what is going on.

First, it is the case that Jeff Bezos attended a Montessori children's house program in Albuquerque for "a year and a half, starting at age 2 1/2." He's often cited as part of the so-called "Montessori Mafia" of the creative elite, including Montessori alumni Larry Page and Sergei Brin (Google), Will Wright (the Sims), and Julia Child (Mastering the Art of French Cooking)—but not, as is often claimed, Jimmy Wales (Wikipedia), who has disavowed the association.

It's also the case that Bezos is a relatively new entrant to the world of high-dollar philanthropic investment by tech billionaires such as Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elon Musk. Up to now his contributions have been in the tens of millions, not billions—nothing to sniff at, to be sure, but not on the scale of his peers among America's wealthiest and most successful people. Last year, Bezos notably requested guidance from his followers on Twitter as to how to direct his philanthropic strategy. So he is new to this world, and he is coming at it in a way that is characteristically, what can we call it? Disruptive?

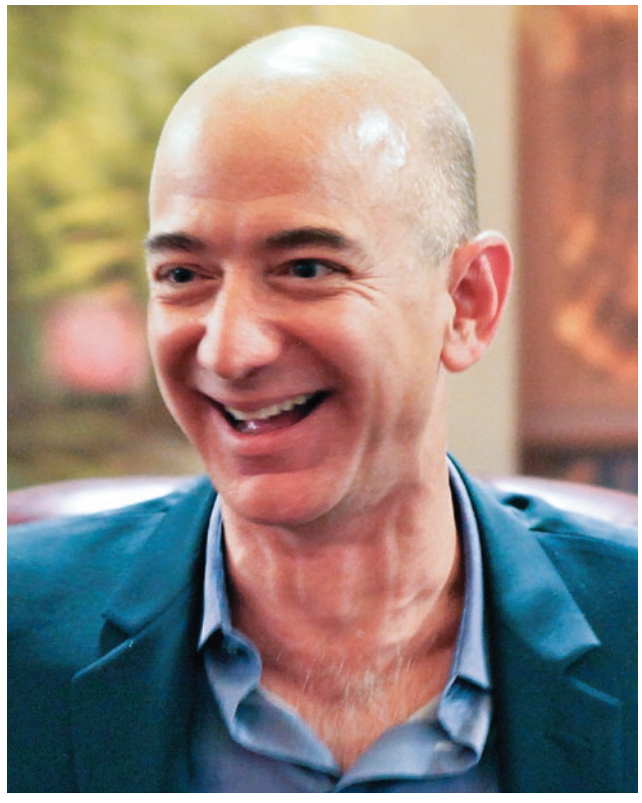
Then, scale—that's what make this so startling. What does one billion in philanthropy look like? The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has put about that much into global malaria control since 2011. The Ford Foundation is giving $1 billion over five years to 300 social justice organizations. So $2 billion—there's no sense, yet, of the time frame for the investment—is national, maybe even global in scale.

Finally, the element of surprise. As the New York Times put it, "few were more surprised than Montessori organizations and leaders themselves" by Bezos' announcement. And what's really surprising is that it was such a surprise. This just isn't how this kind of thing is usually done. When the Gates Foundation spends $1 billion on malaria, it's spending into a well established network of partners and channels working in the field. This is different, at least at this stage. But then again, Bezos didn't get Amazon to where it is today by doing things the way they're usually done.

So the scale, the surprise, and the brevity of the announcement has invited a lot of interpretation and parsing, with articles in the New York Times, Forbes, Education Week, Chalkbeat, and beyond. Let's have a look at what he actually said.

First, the announcement calls for "a commitment of $2 billion and focus on two areas." But it doesn't say how much for each! For all we know, it could be $1.9B for homeless shelters and $100,000 left for schools. Unlikely perhaps but there's no way of knowing for now, although most publications (including this one) have taken the billion and run with it.

Then there's the "network of new, non-profit, tier-one preschools in low-income communities." A network implies connectedness, and (later in the tweet) "launch and operate" sounds like it will be the Day 1 Foundation's network, not someone else's. "Non-profit" is intriguing, especially coming from the founder of a for-profit company which was once notorious for not making profits. But due to U.S. tax law, many if not most private schools are non-profits, so this may not mean much either way. "Tier-one" sounds like education jargon but here it seems to mean simply "first-rate." Finally, "in low-income communities" is laudable, but it does glide lightly over a central issue in U.S. education and social policy: Why are there low-income communities in the first place? That is, why is there such a disparity in wealth and residential patterns? How is it that the educational opportunities in these communities are so lacking that they stand in need of something like this?



Jeff Bezos

That's in the announcement of the two funds. The fuller description comprises two sentences which I've edited together here: "The Day 1 Acadamies Fund will build an organization to [...] launch and [directly] operate a network of high-quality, full-scholarship, Montessori-inspired preschools in underserved communities." "Build, launch, and operate" sounds like a brand new venture, separate from and potentially in competition with existing networks and programs, so you can see how that makes existing players a little nervous. Then again, they are his billions. $1 billion could fund 1000 schools at $1 million each, which would be a big network.

"High quality" is referenced again, which sounds promising. "Full scholarship" also carries implications. Will there be tuition for some families? Who qualifies for scholarship and how? Scholarship is different from a network of free, publicly available programs… such as conventional public schools. Then, "underserved communities" again, which is promising and also potentially problematic.

Oh, and, a little out of order—"Montessori-inspired." This is the phrase that has the Montessori world really jumping up and down. "Montessori-inspired" or "Montessori-lite" or even "Monte-something" are terms with a powerful, mostly negative associations in the Montessori world. And Montessorians' concerns about "watered-down" Montessori are well-grounded, as research suggests that Montessori works best when it's fully implemented.

So it seems, going on just this one tweet, that there is a lot here to explore and learn about, on all sides—Montessori could stand to suspend judgment a bit while we learn more about what Bezos has in mind, and Bezos could perhaps stand to learn a bit more about Montessori and the existing Montessori ecosystem. Fortunately, the Montessori world has not been slow to offer some lessons and demonstrations.

Montessori Facebook pretty much exploded with the news. We don't know if Bezos follows these pages or not, but the reaction might not have been exactly what he was expecting. Many took issue with "Montessori-inspired" and "the child will be the customer," which is perhaps understandable given

A network of high-quality, full-scholarship, Montessori-inspired preschools in underserved communities

perspectives common (although not universal) among Montessorians. More than a few responders suggested that if Bezos wanted to improve the lives of low-income families, he could raise wages at Amazon. Some raised legitimate questions about the role of billionaire philanthropy in U.S. education, a concern that has found expression recently in mainstream editorial writing. And many raised issues of equity and representation, in particular in a press release from Montessori for Social Justice.

Still, the fact remains that world economic history has brought us to this moment where Bezos, Gates, and others like them are in the position to do a lot of good in the world with the wealth they have amassed, and plenty of people were saying, "go ahead and take the money."

The world of Montessori institutions mounted a more coordinated response. Over the last seven years, supported by the funder collaborative Trust For Learning, national and international Montessori organizations have joined forces in the Montessori Leaders Collaborative (MLC) to "advocate for Montessori education through a strong, proactive, and collective voice." MLC and Trust leaders worked behind the scenes to urge Montessori organizations to collaborate on a response, rather than jockeying for position for influence, access, and their particular Montessori focus. This was an opportunity for Montessori, in association with high-level education funders such as the Buffet Early Childhood Fund and the Brady Education Foundation (among others) to speak with one voice from the perspective of knowledgeable, committed people and organizations already deeply invested in this work. Their letter to Bezos has the potential to be the opening round of a conversation in which we can see if our priorities and principles and his are truly in alignment, and to learn from one another what will be the best way to go forward.

The public culmination, however, of all these responses manifested in an article in the New York Times on September 21, probably the one thing that people outside of the Montessori world are likely to encounter. In large part because of the intentional coordination, the right people were reached and important Montessori concerns were heard and well-represented. Rebecca Pelton, President of the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) spoke out for the need for high quality teacher training. "Montessori is not copyrighted" made its way in, as did Angeline Lillard's research supporting high fidelity programs. Montessori's origins with low-income children was mentioned, along with Mira Debs' research into equity in modern Montessori schools. And the piece closed with a powerful quote from Faybra Hemphill, a Montessori for Social Justice board member and director of racial equity, curriculum and training at City Garden Montessori School in St. Louis:

"Go to the communities, talk to parents, talk to children, talk to teachers and administrators and ask them: 'What do you need? What are your hopes and dreams for education and for your children?'"

"Because otherwise," she added, "what will happen is that we're doing this to the community instead of for the community."

It remains to be seen what happens next. MontessoriPublic will publish updates as they develop.

Montessori could stand to suspend judgment, and Bezos could stand to learn a bit more about Montessori

David Ayer is the Communications Director for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector

Poetry and joy in the classroom

Connecting with students through expressive language

BY **ROBERTO** AND **LORENA GERMÁN**

Toward a restorative pedagogy

In the U.S., schools have historically operated as sites of oppression within and for communities of color. They have been institutions that consistently asked students and their communities to leave their culture and ways of being outside. In order to succeed academically, students have had to leave their voices out on the sidewalk to enter and learn in silence. Yet, writing requires a piece of oneself, and using the classroom as a place where students can express themselves through the written form is restorative. One of the ways that we do this is by inviting students to write poetry, in any way, in any language, and to share it. That brings smiles and it celebrates who students are. We want and ask students to write, to share, to speak, to laugh, to be themselves and do so in the ways that honor their communities.

We ask students to write, to share, to speak, to laugh, to be themselves in the ways that honor their communities

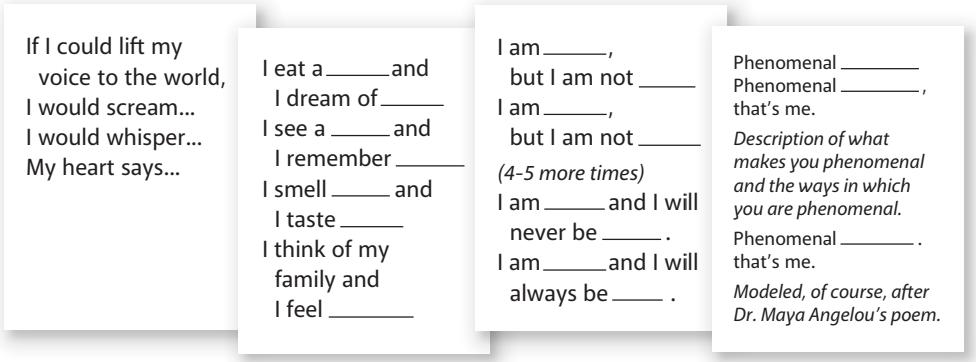
At Magnolia Montessori For All in Austin, Texas

During my (Roberto's) tenure at Magnolia Montessori For All, Ms. Christina Keller always invited me to lead writing workshops with her lower elementary students. Last spring, I had the opportunity to witness the third graders, with whom I had engaged in writing workshops in previous years, demonstrate the eloquence in their writing and have to say matters and that their voice needs to be heard.

Upon starting the second writing prompt, the level of focus had increased, as had the enthusiasm to share their writing. They were hooked! Much of their high level of engagement can be attributed to the work that Christina, and her Associate Guide, had done throughout the course of the year in building meaningful relationships and encouraging the children to reflect and write. I was able to come in at the end of that process, which was a fun role to play as it allowed me and the children to experience the joy of connecting through poetry.

confidence in their sharing. As always, I started our writing workshop by stating the reason that I was present and my hope for our time together. Then I shared the writing norms to ensure that we were all on the same page: Speak your truth, embrace your voice, write and share in the language that you are most comfortable with, and have fun!

After setting the purpose of our time together, I read and performed some of my own work. I always make it a point to share about myself and give them a piece of my own writing as a way to build rapport and begin to gain some of their trust. The first writing prompt was an I AM poem, which is a great way to get students to authentically share of themselves. That was followed by sharing. After each student shared their pieces, I commented on the lines that resonated with me and asked questions to dive deeper into the thinking and writing process of each child. This helped them to feel seen, heard, and sent the message that their writing was valuable. I explicitly told them that what they have to say matters and that their voice needs to be heard.



Bringing this to your classroom

The structure for such a class requires relationship at its foundation. This may sound obvious, but it goes beyond knowing the basics. It's not about knowing the who or what about a student, but about knowing the why and how many, how often, and more. Additionally, this is not about a "one and done" special event that culminates a study or a unit. This is not about handshakes or pop culture dances. This is a type of classroom environment. These types of poetry moments call upon a deep history of communities of color considering our indigenous practices and communal styles of communication. This is a sacred space.

Spending time at the start of the year getting to know students and sharing who you are, as well is an integral part of building this classroom culture. Writing is a part of that, too. We share our favorite poems with them. We take time to write alongside them and share our writings. That requires some vulnerability on our part, but if we ask it of our students, then we need to be ready to practice it.

Incorporating these types of lessons can happen in numerous ways. One way to bring in more poetry and writing is spending time once a week as writing and sharing day, or shorter, daily writing time. The point is to create a culture of writing where students know that sharing is involved at some point, and then they are ready to go. It's amazing to see how quickly they lose their inhibitions and share their deepest fears or funniest poems. They bear their heart in ink on that paper and this is what builds community. That builds trust in the room, and that is how you work toward liberation in classrooms where young people's voices are often silenced.

Prompts

We suggest starting with simple prompts that appeal to general thoughts and feelings. That allows for students to engage and not feel intimidated by poetry, which can happen. We also recommend offering these prompts as a way to provide some structure within freedom. The structures, or the frames, may offer students words and a path to express themselves in ways they may not have considered. We often pull prompts from daily life issues as well as use famous poems either as mentor texts or as springboards for new poems. See some examples above.

In the end, what we want to encourage you to do is to create a culture of writing in your classrooms, invite students to come as they are, welcome their voices, and celebrate their identities. A love of sharing, of writing, and of community will be sparked. It's about joyfully celebrating all while challenging ourselves in ways that only make us better.

Lorena Germán teaches using culturally sustaining pedagogy at Headwaters School in Austin, Texas, where Roberto Germán is the Head of Middle School. Together, they co-founded The Multicultural Classroom, an organization dedicated to working toward justice and equity in education.

$3 million for Montessori research

The first ever federally funded study of Montessori education

BY **DAVID AYER**

This article was reprinted from MontessoriPublic.org

There's so much important news in this that it's hard to get it all in one sentence.

First, **$3 million**. That's a lot of money, and it's a different $3 million from the $3 million the Brady Education Foundation pledged to Montessori research back in 2017, and recently launched.

Next, **federally funded**. This is the first focused Montessori research study to receive funding from the federal Institute for Education Sciences, or IES. For more on what that means, see below.

Then, **study scope** and **research design**. The study is a randomly-controlled trial (RCT), the "gold standard" for research studies. Children who won random lottery admittance to one of 18 public Montessori schools will be compared to those who didn't (almost 500 children in all), eliminating selection bias. The Furman study, with 7,000 children from 45 schools, was much larger, but could not use random assignment.

Finally, **Angeline Lillard**. The prominent Montessori researcher, author of several important studies and the groundbreaking *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius* (now in its 3rd edition), will be a co-principal investigator on the project, guiding the Montessori aspects of the research.

Altogether, this is a really big deal.

So how did this happen?

What does it take to get national attention for Montessori research?

As it happens, two threads in the education research world came together to create this opportunity.

The first is the fallout from a prominent pre-K effectiveness study in Tennessee completed in 2015. For decades, researchers and policy-makers have focused on pre-Kindergarten as an intervention to address persistent race and income disparities in "school readiness" and later academic achievement in U.S. children. However, the research supporting pre-K rests mostly on studies of two programs from the 60s and 70s: the Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Project. Both programs were intensive, well-funded, and seen as challenging to replicate at large scale. More broadly implemented early childhood programs have delivered mixed results at best, with a well-documented "fadeout" effect where early academic gains seem to dissipate in later grades.

In 2013, researchers Mark Lipsey and Dale Farran began an IES-funded study of Tennessee's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (TN-VPK), a lottery-based, full-day prekindergarten program with statewide uniform standards serving low-income and at-risk children. The lottery allowed for a randomized controlled trial research design, in which 773 TN-VPK children were compared with 303 control children through second grade on a variety of cognitive and non-cognitive measures.

In 2015, Lipsey and Farran released some dismaying results. While the pre-K participants had showed early gains on achievement tests, teacher ratings, and work skills, by the end of kindergarten, the advantages had disappeared, and by the end of 2nd and 3rd grade, work skills, attitudes about school, and academic scores had not just "faded out", but had fallen below the control group. The children were actually worse off for having participated in pre-K.

Naturally, these findings caused quite a stir in the education research world, in particular at the American Institutes for Research (AIR). AIR is a 70-year-old preeminent behavior and social research nonprofit with a budget of nearly $500 million, funding research, evaluation, assessment, technical assistance, and systems for governments and government agencies around the world. The researchers at AIR were curious about the grade school drop-off: was it some kind of "burnout", caused by early academic emphasis in the Pre-K program? They wondered if Montessori, despite being academically strong, might not show this "burnout" effect.

This is where the second strand weaves in. In 2016, Dr. Lillard was wrapping up a study in Hartford public Montessori preschools (funded by the Brady Education Foundation), in which Montessori children rated higher in academic achievement, social cognition, mastery orientation, and school enjoyment. Even more important, according to the study, "Montessori education greatly reduced the achievement gap across the preschool years." This work was the latest manifestation of

Angeline Lillard

steady growth in significant, well-recognized Montessori research going back to Lillard's 2005 book and including her 2006 Milwaukee Public Schools study, her 2012 and 2016 "classic versus supplemented Montessori" papers, and the 2011-2016 Furman study in South Carolina. This "golden age of Montessori research" has been made possible in part by the recent collaboration across Montessori organizations facilitated by the Trust for Learning.

"Out of the blue one day," Dr. Lillard said, but most likely because of her prominence in the field of Montessori research, AIR invited her to partner with them on a grant proposal to the U.S. government's Institute for Education Science (IES), to help answer the "burnout" question. And this is where Montessori research hits the big time.

The IES is the "statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education," created in 2002 as part of No Child Left Behind to implement the requirement that education reform efforts should reflect "scientifically based research standards." The Institute issues hundreds of millions of dollars in grants annually ($230 million in 2016, $170 million in 2017), typically in awards of $1 million or more. AIR has a close relationship with the IES, with expertise in developing grant proposals for the institute and having recently won a five-year, $17.6 million bid to manage the Institute's What Works Clearinghouse."

Dr. Lillard had applied to the IES for funding before—for what became the Hartford study, in fact, in 2007. But reviewers were not positive; one stated that there was no practical need for a study of Montessori education. This time the response at IES would be different. After an initial rejection, the AIR-UVA/Lillard study has been funded. Methodologically, it essentially extends the Hartford study to 18 schools nationwide meeting the following criteria:

- Lottery-based enrollment beginning with three year-olds
- Ideally, two-and-a-half to three-hour work periods daily
- At least 75% AMI or AMS certified teachers

AIR and Lillard plan to use some of the same measures from the Hartford study, including the widely used Woodcock-Johnson tests as well as social-emotional assessments. At the start of Montessori Primary, children will be assessed with 45 minutes of simple games, which will be repeated at the end of the school year for three years. Researchers will also be using two classroom environment measures: the well-established Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Developmental Environment Rating Scale (DERS), developed by the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector specifically to evaluate developmental environments such as Montessori classrooms. In addition, the team is developing a Montessori implementation scale for this study, so Montessori implementation can be correlated with the outcome measures.

Montessori-first literacy at Cornerstone

continued from page 1

Taylor knew that nothing of academic significance would take place until the children felt safe taking academic risk.

> *"Children must first know they are part of a community where all have strengths and all have struggles and that everyone, regardless of the behavior or academic struggles they are overcoming, has something important to offer. Children come to believe in themselves as capable people and as important members of society. Children know who they are as learners and gain a sense of control over their lives at school—a new and empowering experience for many of the children we serve. It is these children, then, who have an enormous capacity to take on real academic challenge—to do hard things—and to thrive in the inspiring and rigorous academics AMI classrooms are known for."*

In preparation, the guides also took Orton-Gillingham training, a century-old approach to reading instruction that the team found to be effective and compatible with Montessori as a remediation tool. While the approach is not a replacement for the Montessori curriculum, especially if a full three-year primary experience is available, Montessori teachers and trainers have found Orton-Gillingham's structured, sequential approach to be helpful with remediation and reading disabilities.

Testing would not begin until the second year, when a handful of students entered third grade. Cornerstone looked closely at the tests they would be required to give. VOA initially required the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, as well as the state-mandated Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA). The school didn't find the MAP valuable relative to the amount of time spent on it, and moved to the Optional Local Purpose Assessment (OLPA), a low-stakes "MCA practice test" which was more Montessori friendly and provided better information.

But the school, while mindful of the need to demonstrate proficiency as valued by the outside world, always kept at the forefront the optimal development of the whole child. Montessori and child development would be at the core, and adapatations would have to be consistent with AMI Montessori, consistent with human development, and accessible on the shelf for all children to use to support their developmental needs.

When the children arrived, guides spent a lot of time doing formative assessment in a Montessori context, often simply bringing out materials to see what children could do with them. The limits were quickly apparent. Guides used Orton-Gillingham techniques to directly teach phonics, sound-symbol association, linguistic rules, etc. Children's House materials such as sandpaper letters and the movable alphabet are not appropriate when seeking to engage and inspire these second plane children. At the same time, guides continued with the rest of the elementary program: telling stories, giving lessons with materials, inspiring follow-up work, Going Out, offering choice, and building a strong and inclusive community.

While Orton-Gillingham was a good intervention for the most struggling readers, it was not a replacement for strong literacy development in all children— there was still something missing between the rich literacy experience of AMI early childhood programs and what the elementary guides were prepared to offer children who hadn't had that experience. The school began another intervention: using a reading specialist. This was a conventional classroom teacher with additional training and years of experience in supporting the development of exceptional literacy skills. She had been unsatisfied with what she saw in conventional settings and felt an immediate fit with the Montessori approach towards the whole child. "We hired her to work with some of our most struggling readers but even more importantly, to train us to do the work ourselves", Taylor said. She helped the guides better understand literacy acquisition, and they took the teaching back in the classroom to implement with Montessori materials, so the work could be done without compromising Montessori integrity.

We let child development, human tendencies, and developmental characteristics drive what we're doing

The Elementary curriculum is difficult to access without reading skills

A third adaptation was something "you wouldn't see in AMI schools," Taylor said. The school adopted, as a temporary intervention, a whole-school, whole staff, from the head of school on down, daily community "reading for all" activity. Right after lunch and recess every day, the whole school would drop everything and read together—sometimes individually, sometimes in groups, sometimes with adults "just sitting and modeling reading and loving reading and being readers. It changed the culture of the school around reading," Taylor said. "I couldn't believe how much they were devouring books, loving to discuss—it was a huge turning point for us."

Guides were explicit with children about what they were doing, talking about building up stamina as readers, telling them about Montessori's discoveries about the power of their intellect in the second plane and sharing Dr. Stephen Hughes' observations about brain development, appealing to the children's reasoning minds.

What about periodic assessments and "data driven interventions"? Currently at Cornerstone, all children are assessed with the DIBELS test in the fall. Those that test at "grade level" are not tested again that year; others are provided with targeted support throughout the year. The goal is to get enough information to stay accountable to the state of Minnesota, but more importantly, to help the guides know where that "sweet spot" is, or a child's "instructional reading level", so that when children are reading and researching and doing that big work they love, they're doing it in a place that will move their skills along.

Taylor explains the emphasis on learning, rather than testing:

> *"We never want to assess more than what's needed for that key information. It's observation—observation of the child loving their work, loving to read, that gives us more important information than those scores. The information that regimented, incremental testing provides isn't worth the time or the disruption. When a child is working at a place that's optimal for them, in a protected work cycle allowing for deep concentration, that's when we'll see the best learning, and not squelch the process. Whatever we're implementing, we don't want to fall into working down this list or that list, letting a program or systems drive instruction for whole groups or schools of children, all of whom have differing needs. We will, instead, let child development, human tendencies, and developmental characteristics drive what we're doing."*

So what happened with reading scores? "The first two years of scores were hard—we knew they would be!" Taylor said. They had just 13 third-years to test, so if one child has an off day, that can be 7% of the score. The school was rated as "Continuous Improvement", which is a warning sign for the state. The next year the school got a "growth score" of 30, which was "off the charts", and the authorizer marked the school as a "Celebration School". In the most recent results, Cornerstone's low-SES students are performing 17% to 23% higher in math and reading than similar children in the same area.

What is the long-term goal for the children at Cornerstone? Taylor pushes back on the idea that the goal should be for them to score in the 99th percentile on the state tests. "Why would we want that? Those scores are possible for a few children, but we don't value that as a measure of a child's success as a learner." To push for that from every child would force the school to significantly compromise so many aspects of the child's potential. Cornerstone wants something more: To build an environment where children have sound skills so they can explore, communicate, move, orient, do big group work, go out—and be excited about themselves as learners. Taylor continues: "There's this idea that

Montessori is great for the privileged, but that less privileged children need something different, a much more strict, controlled structure. High fidelity AMI Montessori education is *an aid to life* and provides for optimal human development; we don't think that looks different based on privilege."

At Cornerstone, you can see every day the powerful effects of less privileged children accessing and embracing exceptional education. It's the test results, to be sure, but most importantly it's in the zest the children have for learning, the ownership they are taking for their education, and in the responsible choices and decisions they are learning to make to ensure their successes.

Liesl Taylor is the former Head of School, now Director of Elementary Pedagogy, at Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School. She holds an AMI Elementary diploma and a public school teaching license, K-6 with a specialty in 5-8 Science.

Clark: Centering supportive language

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begin assessing their own psychological safety through two lenses. Are they empowered enough to have their fundamental needs met in the classroom? Will they experience privilege or shame, high status or low status? Privilege/high status: Who has the shiny lunch box or new clothes? Who can read? Who plays well on the monkey bars? Who can feel the results of their personal impact on reality? Who is heard in the classroom? Who is spoken to? Who is addressed positively? Shame/low status: Who has less? Whose actions are limited? Who is constantly being redirected by the teacher? Who cannot feel the impact of their presence on reality? Who is silenced, not spoken to? Whose name carries negative connotations?

The language of a Montessori teacher is as powerful and potent as the silence

It was the first week of school, a few years ago, when I sat by two of my first-grade students. They wore similarly colorful dresses and Afro puff hairstyles and were seated in the classroom library. I saw them assess each other, seemingly to affirm a sense of belonging. I walked away and came back to the library area and heard one little girl, I'll call her Anna, say to the other, "You are a motherf***er." This discord arose over a book. Needless to say, if they were attempting to find a sense of belonging that had failed.

My job as a teacher was to remedy the situation without shaming Anna but letting her know that her language was inappropriate. I had to quickly recognize the unmet needs of the children, assess their sense of safety and belonging, find out their untold stories and offer them another tool for a safe connection. Though they were both African-American girls, their family backgrounds were different. Anna, whose father was in prison, had recently moved to California and was new to Montessori. She went to church regularly—she liked dancing in her church—but she was also familiar with hurtful language. The other little girl felt at home in California, where she lived with both her parents, who tried to protect her from the world's harsh realities.

When I intervened, I did it by remembering that because of Anna's sense of isolation, she probably wanted connection more than anything. I have to admit that this is not the first thought that goes through your mind when you hear foul language from children, but maybe it should be. Children's actions are often driven by their fundamental need to feel connected, safe and esteemed. Anna did not have the language to articulate her feeling of difference from someone who looked so much like her. She could not speak of the negative effects of racism nor could she name what made her feel unsafe and devalued.

Once I recognized what Anna wanted to accomplish with her words, it became easy to have a conversation with her about how her very words were a tool of alienation. I led the girls through a needs-based conversation—a conversation that the children often use at the peace table. Anna first identified how she felt and what she needed from the other girl: "I need you to share and be my friend, listen to me." Then the other little girl had a chance to say how she felt and what she needed. She said that she needed Anna to give her space and to speak nicely. Articulating their feelings allowed the girls to frame and give meaning to their shared reality. It made the problem tangible, one that could be seen, manipulated, and solved, as children do with Montessori materials.

Powerful language became a tool for connection

After many similar peace conversations with a variety of different peers, Anna was able to understand that her peers needed the same kind of thing from her. She soon took the problem into her own hands as she was taught to do with the checkerboard and solved it without adult intervention. Anna didn't just solve it for herself; she created material that would allow others the tools to solve similar problems. It didn't take many conversations before Anna recognized the importance of language and understood what a valuable resource positive language would be. She created a binder of positive words to say in sticky situations and placed this word binder at our peace table as a resource for all of the young first graders coming after her.

I had to look at my own words, my own classroom language.

Learning from my students, I next looked at my own words, my use of language in the classroom language. What was I doing in the classroom circle that these girls were a part of? Was I using language that invited children to solve their own problems? Was I modeling language that allowed children to look behind their privilege and presumed status, to step out of their shame? Did the language shared in our classroom help children recognize the traumas induced by society (including bullying culture)? Was there enough silence between my words to allow children to be mindful of their own emotions and trace their origins?

Portals of self-esteem are opened by what we say, how we say it, and what we don't say. Our words open up new worlds when we ask children essential questions we want them to practice asking themselves: "What will you work on next?" "Where will you sit?" "What does this mean?" "How can you assist you peer?" There are rules to our Montessori language that we feel we must follow to nurture the freedom of the child's soul. When we are teaching a Montessori lesson, we choose our words very carefully to guide their thoughts in the right direction. We are silent at the right time to allow them time to process, and we give them manipulatives to allow them to solve the problems themselves. So my questions to you are: Are you taking the time to teach lessons the same way when a social or emotional problem arises? Do you know who is sitting in your Montessori circle today? What language are you centering? Whose reality is affirmed through your language and who feels erased?

Koren Clark is an educational consultant at the Wildflower Foundation and CEO of KnowThySelf, Inc.

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Wafford: Culturally responsive teaching and literacy

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no idea that there were so many types of sponges, leaves clauses... Stellar nucleosynthesis! The sheer number of new academic vocabulary words I learned in my elementary training was eye-opening and thrilling. This space of authentic learning helped me to unpack the impact of years of demoralizing school experiences. As I was immersed in a pedagogy that challenged me to think about the child directly in front of me, I also began to heal the silenced child within.

Montessori training presented a new lens through which to see learning and teaching. I began to draw from my personal experiences and training as a social worker and thoughtfully challenge a "default" idea of what education is. I learned a lot of content that I had missed in my youth for a number of reasons, including the "opportunity gap", underfunded schools, gender inequity, a general lack of interest, and simply the unappealing way it was delivered. And, I found that there was much that needed to be unlearned. But I also developed a deeper appreciation for the richness of my home culture and literary codes and their influence on the way I approached reading and writing.

Teaching literacy—crossing cultures

Novelist and social critic James Baldwin's "quarrel with the English language" recall my own literacy experience in high school, and have informed my teaching:

> *My quarrel with the English language has been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I begin to see the matter in quite another way. If the language was not my own, it might be the fault of the language; but it might also be my fault. Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it.*

This challenges both the teacher and student. It urges students of color to tenaciously engage with literature perhaps outside their own cultural experiences, but it also calls on educators to support literacy engagement with *all* students. As an educator of color, I have come to see the need for this "dual awareness" of cultural literacy.

I developed a deeper appreciation for the richness of my home culture and literary codes and their influence on the way I approached reading and writing

Dominant culture and power codes

European culture is still dominant in U.S. schools. If you ask a Montessori teacher with a conventional U.S. education to name examples of "classical literature", you're likely to hear authors such as Dickinson, Poe, Twain, Conrad, and Shakespeare, and of course these are but a few of many "literary classics". And it's important for students of color to be able to engage with the dominant culture and its literacy codes. The National Council of Teachers of English position statement on linguistically and culturally diverse learners states:

> *All students need to be taught mainstream power codes/discourses and become critical users of language while also having their home and street codes honored.*

We owe it to students to teach dominant culture in ways that engages them all, while helping them access their own cultural literacy, and to find the powerful connections across these cultures. Montessori educators should prepare environments which help all students to access their own deep culture and classic cultural knowledge in literacy.

This happened for me with a white teacher who truly engaged us with literature. I was exposed to a handful of these "classics" in high school. My English teacher made them interesting by passionately challenging us to grapple with thematic subtleties, societal implications, and political inferences. I can honestly say, it was *her* excitement about Kafka's Metamorphosis, and the gender role discussion she sparked with Ibsen's *A Doll House*, that allowed me to access her cultural classics with receptivity and interest. With her over-the-top expressive delivery, full body movements, floor pacing, and tone inflections, this woman used her literature and truly made it her own. My receptivity to the performative rituals nestled in our English class translated into a deep love for her classic cultural knowledge and the actual stories being read. This forged a fathomless union with my own cultural literature that I cherish to this day.

Developing a deep appreciation

I understand now as a culturally responsive Montessori educator that my ability and willingness as a 16-year old to engage in class and to stretch my understanding of those European authors—in my mind otherwise totally unrelatable—depended heavily upon my teacher's expert command of her content and her insistence upon teaching it to us, along with her ability to authentically reach the African-American and Hispanic students in her English class.

Students' and teachers' own cultures

What's "classic", of course, depends very much on one's cultural frame of reference. By culture, I mean a person's background, lifestyle, spiritual life, and worldview unique to them yet shared and transmitted by their community. For example, the dominant American culture is deeply individualist. Yet, many of our students come from more

collective cultures and may have different ways of accessing and processing information. These differences are rarely considered in the design of standardized tests and school entrance exams and criteria. But Montessori by design incorporates culturally responsive techniques that speak to these cultures. As a diversity practitioner and educator, I often think about how we can articulate and extend Montessori for children of color, who may have a very different "default" culture than the typical Montessori teacher.

Simply "exposing students to a variety of cultures" is not enough. There is a place for educators to insert and integrate their own individual culture, as well as the culture of their students, into literacy lessons. In fact, there is not only a place for this, but a *bona fide* need, as culturally and linguistically diverse students make up a growing number of students in Montessori schools, both private and public, throughout the country. Explicit and rigorous culturally responsive instruction Montessori language materials can promote critical use of language.

As a Montessori educator of color, I see it as a moral imperative to use culture as a vehicle through which academic rigor and expectations of excellence are articulated in every reading lesson, writing project, and follow-up assignment. Research suggests that using culture as a cognitive hook can help teachers create a perfect synergy of rigor and culturally responsive content which validates identity and deepens information processing.

What's "classic", of course, depends very much on one's cultural frame of reference

Connecting across cultures

As students are encouraged to connect deeply with literary texts, they begin to understand that our identities are comprised of many factors, some of which are in our control, and many which are not. The ways we perceive ourselves and how others see us can develop over time or change abruptly, and rarely stay the same throughout our lives and education. The many dimensions of our identities and cultural literacies make us complex beings, each with a different perspective and a story to tell. It's only when we listen to the stories of individuals that these unique identities become clear, and we can begin to break down the social barriers that divide us and build understanding. This is what we can learn from literature, if we can engage deeply.

Students must be challenged to grapple with their language work, to make it their own and not to simply imitate it. Literacy approached through a lens of critical consciousness allows both students and educators to pull back the layers and begin to use literacy learning and teaching as a means of liberation.

When deep cultural work is emphasized along with lessons designed with a keen awareness of identity development, the social brain, and the academic impact of collaborative work, opportunities for critical thinking increase and learning is accelerated for all students.

I propose that we create intentional space for Montessorians to understand the culture of power that exists within society. From there, developing our understanding around how these inequities impact literacy instruction so our students can be given full access to instruction that will allow them to be competitive and competent in their reading, comprehension, vocabulary, and written expression. It is my belief that as we ground ourselves deeper in philosophy and our roles as observers and scientists in both society and the classroom, we will begin to see the true literacy needs of our students.

Maati Wafford holds a B.A. in Psychology from Fisk University and Masters in Social Work from Howard University, and AMS Early Childhood, Lower Elementary, Administration credentials from the Institute for Advanced Montessori Studies.

What's new at NCMPS

BY **NCMPS STAFF**

This fall, NCMPS has several new projects and people to extend our work helping schools do more and better public Montessori.

Teach-Montessori.org

Teach-Montessori launched four years ago as a project to bring more people into Montessori teacher training. This fall it is re-launching with a fresh new look, new streamlined functionality, and accessible information for non-Montessori visitors.

The site features job listings for candidates and employers (including links to the AMI-USA, AMS, and NAMTA job boards), a searchable map with links to MACTE-accredited training centers, and a brief orientation to Montessori teaching and training for people just getting interested. Public and private job listings are welcome. Public jobs and training programs supporting public school teachers will be featured on the home page.

The Montessori Census

The Montessori Census isn't exactly new this fall, but it is roaring back. We used the Census listings to get participants for Angeline Lillard's new $3M federally funded study! Participation truly supports national research and advocacy efforts.

We're holding steady at 515 public programs, as we've brought in a few we had missed and cleaned out some inactive listings. Of those, about 200 have been "claimed" by active users, and about 100 of those have the most updated information. If your school profile is missing, unclaimed or incorrect, get someone from administration to list it, claim it, or update it—instructions are on the site at montessoricensus.org, or you can contact info@montessoricensus.org

Coaching, Child Study, and more

Last year more than 120 people took the Montessori Coaches Training, in Washington, DC, Portland, St, Louis, Chicago, and San Diego. This year 50 more have trained in DC and Savannah, and Vancouver, BC, Savannah, and Rock Hill are still to come. We've scheduled Milwaukee, Austin, and Denver for 2019 with several more in the planning stages. Coaches, teachers, and leaders have extended their practice with Child Study trainings in DC and Savannah, and we've added Denver to the 2018 line-up. You can see the whole calendar here or at the NCMPS.org Events page.

More places, more people

NCMPS is reaching out to the Colorado (and beyond) Montessori community from Denver, where new team member and **Regional Coordinator Seth D. Webb** is developing a second hub of networked schools and organizations. The region is home to more than 30 public Montessori schools (and 100+ private programs), four training centers, and a thriving Colorado Montessori Association.

Seth has worked in public charter Montessori schools in Arizona, Colorado, and New Zealand as a teacher and leader, and has been a conference presenter, lecturer, and training center field consultant. Seth holds AMS 6-12 and AMI 12-18 credentials, Colorado state licensing, and a MAEd from the Center for Contemporary Montessori Programs at St. Catherine University

We also welcome **Race and Equity Advisor Maati Wafford**. Maati is a culturally responsive Montessori educator and advocate for equity in the classroom, an instructor at the Institute for Advanced Montessori Studies at Barrie, and an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins School of Education. She holds AMS 3–6, 6–9, and Administration credentials, a B.A. in Psychology from Fisk University and a MSW from Howard University.

Finally, **Project Manager Katy Mattis** will be working on our Standards Alignment project. Katy has worked in private, carter and magnet Montessori programs as an Elementary guide, instructional leader and principal, mostly in Denver Public Schools. She holds AMI 0-3 and 6-12 diplomas, an M.Ed in Montessori Education from Loyola College, and Colorado teacher and principal certificates.

Upcoming trainings:

10/17–18	**Coaches Training** Vancouver, BC
10/20	**Child Study Training** Portland, OR
11/1–2	**Coaches Training** Rock Hill, SC
11/17	**Child Study Training** Denver, CO
1/10–12	**Coaches Training** Milwaukee, WI
3/14–16	**Coaches Training** Denver, CO

We need your voice!

Write an article for MontessoriPublic

MontessoriPublic shares the stories of the public Montessori world, but we can't do it without you. Here's how you can contribute.

What should I write about? Next issue's focus is literacy in the public Montessori environment. Some feel that Montessori training has a deficit here; others will say that everything you need is there if fully implemented. What was your experience?

Research? Opinion? Well-reasoned, clearly stated positions are interesting even if they're controversial. Say something strong and from the heart, backed up with a few strong statistics.

Experienced writers only? No! First-time writers and published authors alike have appeared in these pages.

How long should it be? 900-1,000 words is great: Enough room to say something worth saying, but not so long that readers lose interest. Plus, it fits nicely on the page, with room for an image or an ad. You can get a feel for pieces of that length from the ones in this issue.

What's the deadline? The final deadline for the February issue is **January 16th**, which gives us a little time for editing and communication with writers. Submitting even earlier is fine! That gives us even more time to get your work just right.

What about pictures and a short biography? Every article looks better with a nice, high resolution photo helping to tell the story. We also need a high resolution "head shot" for the author images. "High resolution" usually means a file size of 1MB+. Add a short (50 words or fewer) biography and we're all set.

Will I get paid? Unfortunately, no. On our limited budget, we can't pay writers at this time. Ad revenue covers some costs, and our fundraising is directed as much as possible to supporting public Montessori programs. We can only thank you for adding your work and your voice to that support.

Send your submissions to David Ayer: editor@montessoripublic.org

The public calendar

2018

October 11–14	**AMI Affiliates Conference** BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS IN SUPPORT OF THE CHILD, TEACHER AND PARENTS *COLUMBIA, MARYLAND*
November 8–11	**International Montessori Council Annual Conference** LIVING THE MONTESSORI WAY *SARASOTA, FLORIDA*
November 8–11	**AMI Affiliates Conference** MONTESSORI'S FRAMEWORK: RESHAPING EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN *DALLAS, TEXAS*

2019

January 18–19	**Public Montessori Educators of Texas Conference** *WACO, TEXAS*
January 18–21	**Montessori Leaders Symposium** *PANAMA*
February 15–18	**AMI/USA Refresher Course** *NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA*
March 1–3	**MEPI Hands for Peace Conference** *KIAWAH ISLAND RESORT* *SOUTH CAROLINA*
March 21–24	**AMS Annual Conference** THE MONTESSORI EVENT *WASHINGTON MARRIOTT WARDMAN PARK* *WASHINGTON, DC*
April 4–7	**AMI Affiliates Conference** MONTESSORI GUIDANCE FOR ADAPTING TO THE GLOBAL DIGITAL CULTURE *TACOMA, WASHINGTON*
June 20–23	**Montessori for Social Justice Conference** DECOLONIZING HUMAN POTENTIAL *PORTLAND, OREGON*

If you'd like your Montessori event featured here, send it to us!

Deadline for the next issue: **January 16, 2019.**
Be sure to include the date, organization, event title, city and state
Email to: editor@montessoripublic.org

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