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Hard questions for Montessori

Cultivating equity requires facing some real challenges



BY **ALLISON JONES**
AND **MAATI WAFFORD**

As we reflect on our early schooling and our current experience, instances of inequity and discrimination stand out. Montessori says: “A child does not understand injustice with his reason, but he senses that something is wrong and becomes depressed and deformed.”

One of us was a personal witness to these instances. Maati shares her story here:

Early on, I noticed the way skin color, public housing, a single mother, and standing in the monthly line for milk, cheese, beans, canned meat, etc., shaped how adults thought of me, spoke to and over me, and looked through me, the questions they asked,

and essentially what my teachers taught me. I very clearly remember wanting to prove them wrong. I wanted my teachers to see me, to see that special thing about me that perhaps only my family knew. I wished my teachers could just actually see me at school—wouldn't that be nice?

I'm a firm believer that the themes of our lives, both dark and uplifting, can lead us to our purpose. The challenging, most troubling moments can actually propel us towards our destinies. Now, I show up each day as an advocate in my school. I am strongest with students who struggle to find their voices, with young girls who come to school with self-doubt and low self-esteem because of what the world tells them about their worth and value. I am most effective with students who are terrified of math, who have visceral responses when the teacher calls on them to speak. I champion the children who will bomb any test you put in front of them because their academic confidence is so low—and the stakes always seem so high—and it is further confirmed when that test determines your reading group, which stigmatizes in numerous other ways.



Facing Montessori challenges head on

I know these things about myself and I continue to pull back the layers of my personal narrative because I am committed to reflective practice and to Montessori philosophy.

Recently, with their *Montessori Assessment Playbook*, the National Center for Montessori in the Public

Sector has created structures and tools that honor not only the whole child, but the whole adult, the whole administrator, and the whole community. The wide-scope approach to assessments is critical to the future of public Montessori.

In Chapter 6 of the *Playbook*, a critique

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Advancing equity in public Montessori

Collaborating to extend Montessori's reach

BY **THE ADVANCING EQUITY
IN PUBLIC MONTESSORI
COLLABORATIVE**

We face a lot of challenges in public Montessori. Institutional racism skews the playing field for children along racial, cultural, and socio-economic lines. Many of our children endure Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on a regular basis. It's challenging when children graduate from our program and watch as different doors of opportunity open for some and close for others. It's challenging to take energy away from our children and focus it on the administration

of certain assessments that aren't always useful to our practice. It's challenging to feel like there's never enough time to properly care for ourselves, our environments, or our children.

And yet there is also an amazing amount of possibility and promise in public Montessori. Our children are incredibly resilient, brilliant, joyful, kind, curious, and engaged. They are learning how to develop deep pride in themselves as unique individuals and how to navigate across lines of difference. When children learn to be advocates for themselves and for others, they can build a more just and peaceful world for all of us. Public Montessori gives us hope for a better future.

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Jacqui Miller prototypes a tool



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Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Teacher Training Partners

Measuring equity in Montessori communities



BY GENEVIEVE D'CRUZ

Equity is entering more and more conversations, especially in public (conventional and Montessori) education. There are various definitions of the word, but for educational purposes, it means recognizing that all students do not begin from the same place, prioritizing fairness over equality, and meeting all students' needs. Educators and education scholars are looking for more explicit ways to embed inclusion and access into practice. As Montessori practitioners, we have both intangible and tangible ways to examine and measure whether our schools and classes provide an equitable experience for all children. Montessori philosophy lends itself well to social justice, but this requires more work than the citation of a quote every now and then. It requires active work to ensure that the children we serve have

access to everything they need during their development, both in individual classes and whole schools. Dr. Montessori described the preparation of the adult as a transformation of the spirit. This not only means what we learn in training (knowledge of development and growing our patience), but continued work on ourselves afterwards. We should continue to examine ourselves to note whether we are prepared adults, ready to provide the children with an environment suitable for

bias, as it has been embedded in our belief system based on what we have heard, learned, experienced, and been taught. Observation, in principle, is meant to be objective. However, even in our objective observations of classes and schools, we must ask ourselves where there might be bias. Implicit bias is combated by learning about our own biases, with tools such as Harvard University's Implicit Association Test, which tells test-takers which groups they see in negative and/or favored lenses. This is a starting point,

Montessori lends itself well to social justice, but this requires more than citing a quote every now and then

all their needs. An intangible way to note whether we are even able to provide a fair experience for the children in our care is to notice our own implicit bias—the internal stereotypes that unconsciously affect our actions and beliefs. Implicit bias can influence our lesson planning, how we speak to students, and assumptions we make about families. It is difficult to see our implicit

for us to recognize our biases and become aware of them. The work does not end there; when in situations where we notice our implicit biases bubbling up, we should take the opportunity to examine concrete facts. Additionally, we can actively seek out positive, individual, examples

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COMING FALL 2019: The public Montessori story

Where are we strong? How did we get there? Where are we headed next?

Contributions, observations, and letters, on this or any public Montessori topics, are invited at editor@montessoripublic.org

Your deadline is **Sept 2, 2019**.
More guidelines on page 23.

In this issue: Equity

This issue of *MontessoriPublic* takes on equity, asking what changes are needed. **The Advancing Equity in Public Montessori Collaborative** calls for collaboration to meet the challenges facing public Montessori. **Michelle Boyle** (NCMPS) and **Jeremy Lightsmith** (Transparent Classroom) tell us about a new tool for fighting implicit bias with data. **Elizabeth Prunello Bruno, Barbara Crockett, and Iheoma Iruka** give us the details on a new \$3M national study looking at equity in Montessori education.

Genevieve D'Cruz, a guide and coach at Lee Montessori Public Charter School, contextualizes implicit bias. **Kathleen Guinan**, CEO at Crossway Community, shares her organization's intergenerational work. **Elise Huneke**, AMI trainer, has an epiphany.

Andrea Johnson, founder of Montessori Seeds Academy, reflects on the divided community in Charlotte, NC. **Allison Jones** (Breakthrough) and **Maati Wafford** (NCMPS, the Barrie School) dig into the hard questions Montessori needs to face when advancing equity. **Jennifer Wyld** (Montessori Northwest) describes equity work at her training center.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE OF MONTESSORIPUBLIC:

David Ayer (NCMPS) reports on a call to action from researcher Angeline Lillard, as well as a major Montessori early childhood education landscape analysis from ETS. **Annie Frazer**, Executive Director at Montessori Partnerships for Georgia invites us to see Montessori as part of a bigger pattern in the world.



National Montessori equity study underway

Can Montessori reduce economic and racial disparities?



BY **ELIZABETH PUNGELLO BRUNO, BARBARA CROCKETT, AND IHEOMA U. IRUKA**

The mission of the Brady Education Foundation (BEF) is to close the opportunity and achievement gaps via the funding of research and evaluation projects that bring practitioners and researchers together to inform private investment and public policy.

One of the Foundation's early projects was to fund an investigation of the impact of the Montessori approach in two public magnet schools in Hartford, CT. This work was led by Angeline Lillard from the University of Virginia (UVA). The study found a positive impact of Montessori overall, and the findings suggested that the Montessori approach may have the potential to close the economic and racial opportunity and achievement gaps.

Around the same time that these results were being released, the findings from a large study of Montessori education in South Carolina public schools led by Brooke Culclasure were published as well. Those findings also suggested that Montessori has a positive impact overall and may help to close these gaps.

Given the BEF Board's focus on seeking ways to effectively address the opportunity and achievement gaps, the results from these and other studies led the Board to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to conduct a large and rigorous, multi-site study to examine Montessori's potential to reduce the economic and racial disparities, especially for children from low-income households and for Black/African American and Latinx children.

While the Hartford study was able to capitalize on lotteries and thus conduct a randomized control trial (the gold standard in research to investigate effects), it was relatively small in terms of the sample size and lacked the ethnic diversity needed to examine whether children of color equally benefited from Montessori. In addition, it could not compare income groups based upon a

policy relevant income split (e.g., students who qualified for free and reduced lunch) and instead had to use a median income split of the sample to compare children from higher and lower income households. In contrast, the South Carolina study did have a large sample that was ethnically and economically diverse, but their quasi-experimental design limited the ability to conclusively confirm that Montessori was indeed effective in reducing the economic and racial disparities. Despite these limitations, the results of these and other studies were compelling enough to lead



implications for both who is invited to participate in the study as well as the team of investigators conducting it. The primary aim of the AIR/UVA study is to examine the impact of Montessori education in a sample representative of the general population and to explore how effects may change by variation in fidelity. This important study has the potential to provide much needed information

carried out by white researchers, which likely limits the types of information gathered and the interpretations of findings, often using a deficit lens. The opportunity and achievement gaps are one of the pernicious social problems in the U.S., requiring diverse expertise and experiences to find a solution. The success of this work, and subsequently policy drivers, depends on respectful collaboration across disciplines, practice, cultures and ethnicities, school systems, and geographic locations.

The RFP was issued in the summer of 2017, and three teams were eventually selected: Teams from Child Trends led by Diane Early and Joy Thompson and the Riley Institute at Furman University led by Brooke Culclasure and Delia Allen will collect data, and a team from the University of Kansas Center for Montessori Research led by Angela Murray, Jade Caines Lee and Neal Kingston will serve as the coordinating site for the Initiative. At this time, schools and families are being invited to participate, with plans to begin data collection in the fall of 2019.

Most recently, as part of this initiative, the BEF Board awarded two grants for measurement development. One of these grants has been awarded to the team at the University of Kansas Center for Montessori Research, led by Angela Murray and Carolyn Daoust, to support the continued development of a valid and reliable classroom observation instrument that will assess the implementation of Montessori practices, focusing specifically on teacher behaviors and the prepared environment. This tool will enable the research teams to account for variability in Montessori environments in their analysis and will be freely available for use in other research studies concerning Montessori.

The second measurement development grant has been awarded to a team at Boston University, led by Stephanie Curenton, to support the continued development of the ACES-Snapshot (Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale), a classroom observation instrument that provides information regarding how best to ensure that racially minoritized children, such as Blacks, Latinx, Asian/Pacific Islanders,

The Lillard study suggested that Montessori may have the potential to close economic and racial opportunity and achievement gaps

the BEF Board to embark on a larger Montessori initiative.

Just as BEF launched this initiative, Ann-Marie Faria and colleagues from the American Institutes of Research (AIR) and Angeline Lillard from UVA were awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to investigate the impact of Montessori education in the public sector on children's academic and social-emotional outcomes. Similar to the BEF Initiative, the AIR study will focus on the primary level (PK3-K); follow children for three years; include multiple sites across the country; capitalize on lotteries in order to con-

cerning scaling up the Montessori approach in the public sector. The primary questions being investigated by the BEF initiative are focused on generating data that will inform ways to *close the economic and racial disparities in education achievement and success*. As such, the BEF study is by design working to invite large enough samples from under-represented and under-resourced communities to attempt to have the statistical power to examine Montessori's potential to reduce the effects of household income on children's outcomes and to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children.

In addition, given the focus on diverse

The research teams and the advisory board will reflect the populations being studied at the leadership level

duct an RCT; and examine impacts on achievement, executive functioning and socio-emotional outcomes. With two similar, large national studies, one could reasonably ask, "Why are both studies needed at this time?"

Although very alike in a number of important ways, these two projects differ in terms of their primary questions, which in turn has important

populations, the BEF Board determined that the research teams conducting the work and the Advisory Board guiding the initiative need not only to have solid Montessori expertise and strong research experience, but also to reflect the populations being studied at the leadership level. For too long, the vast amount of research conducted on children of color has been primarily designed and

and Native Americans, are being provided with equitable learning opportunities. As interactions and learning opportunities are critical for children's achievement, there is a need for a tool to support teachers focused attention on children who have historically been excluded from fully benefiting from classroom learning experience. An important goal of this work is to refine and validate the measure for use in Montessori classrooms. This is particularly critical as the same behaviors can have very different meanings in different contexts.

Much of the current push to expand public pre-K is driven by the goal of increasing access to early learning environments that set the foundation for life-long learning. As these early educational systems are being developed and expanded, it is the hope of the BEF Board that the information learned from this initiative will inform this work so that equitable learning opportunities can be provided for all children and the opportunity and achievement gaps are eliminated. We seek to use the results from this study to ensure that policies and practices focused on strengthening early childhood education, and education

writ large, is done with the ultimate goal of reducing economic and racial disparities and simultaneously ensuring that all children are meeting their potential from birth through adulthood.

Elizabeth Pungello Bruno, PhD, is the President of the Brady Education Foundation (BEF). She is also a former Montessori student and Montessori parent.

Barbara Crockett is the Executive Director of BEF. She is a former Montessori teacher, principal and parent.

Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD, is the Chief Research Innovation Officer and Director of the Center for Early Education Research and Evaluation at HighScope Education Research Foundation, as well as a BEF Board Member, a Montessori parent, and a partner with the National Center for Montessori in the Public sector as a Senior Researcher.

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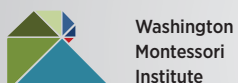
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Making some changes in teacher training

One training center's efforts to build equity in



BY JENNIFER WYLD

Like many in the Montessori community, the staff at Montessori Northwest realizes that we have a role to play in improving diversity and equity in our profession, our schools, and our training centers, and that complex historical and systemic factors drive these deficits. We have begun this work in three areas. First, we've built on work we started last year, offering workshops to our regional Montessori community. We have also begun to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion work into the theory portion of our elementary course. Finally, we have created scholarships for people of the global majority for Primary or Elementary training.

In the winter of 2018, we hosted a training facilitated by Chrysanthius Lathan of Teachers for Racial Equity in Education Ed Consulting (TREE) about "increasing technical knowledge and adaptive abilities needed to empower students and staff of color". This workshop included definitions and specific language to understand and be able to talk about racial justice, as well as lectures, interactive discussions, and reflective activities. Response to this workshop was positive and many spoke to the need for more education and professional development opportunities

related to the topic. So, for the 2018-2019 academic year, a group of local adolescent practitioners organized and hosted three racial and social justice education events through the training center. Lathan offered her workshop again in the fall, and then a more in-depth workshop in the winter of 2019. In this second session, she shared more resources, such as psychological impacts of racism, as well as one of the few studies looking at racial justice in Montessori classrooms (Brown and Steele, 2015). Confluence Project, a local organization that works to bring indigenous voices to the story of the Columbia River, offered a third workshop in partnership with the training center and a local school, a training for educators on how to include stories and history of the Native people of the northwest in a more culturally responsive way. Many of the students in the elementary training attended, and handouts and resources were made available to all trainees for inclusion in their history albums.

Participants recognized the importance of integrating these ideas into their classrooms and their communities, and have asked for us to continue to support these events, so we are working on a similar workshop for the 2019-20 academic year.

To bring this work directly into training, we've been exploring meaningful ways to integrate social and racial justice into the academic year elementary training, regularly dedicating time in theory lectures to this topic. While 33% of the cohort this year are people of the global majority, 50% of those are international students, who may or may not share the experiences and perspectives of BIPOC

of the United States. This has definitely created an environment full of rich conversations and viewpoints! We have developed these topics this year by exploring language used to talk and think about these issues, such as equity vs. equality, stereotype threat, implicit bias, stereotypes vs. prejudices, and more. Many of these conversations were held in small groups, with students moving around the room to sit at tables with different prompts to spur the discussion.

we also shared readings, videos, webinars, and other opportunities to delve into the topics.

After time spent on this internal level of work, we did also consider how to talk about racial and social justice with children and families. One activity was again using prompts for small group discussions, this time with quotes of things children have said that could be hurtful, around race, ethnicity, gender roles, sexuality, family make-up, re-

We've been dedicating time in theory lectures to topics such as social and racial justice

We have also had the students do some work exploring their own identities, privileges, and sense of belonging. Initially, we heard push-back from some students: "Why aren't we focusing on how to talk about this with our students? ... in our classrooms?" However, based on work by racial and social justice educators and researchers (such as Lathan, Robin DiAngelo, Beverly Tatum, Layla Saad, Django Paris, and Samy Alim), we've recognized that educators need to do this work on themselves first. As Montessorians, we already acknowledge the important role of the adult in the classroom and know that the adults, just like the environment, need to be prepared.

With time, and with more conversations and reflections, the students realized the importance of this work and participated fully and deeply in the activities. Besides the discussion prompts,

ligion, language, ability, and so on. Of course, we cannot prepare our educators to know what to say in response to everything they might come across in their careers. However, having already worked through with their peers what to say in some circumstances has given the trainees more confidence in how they might support their students and their communities.

The historical and systemic structure of racial inequity has impacted financial resources in affected populations. In light of this, Montessori Northwest has set aside resources for scholarships towards our academic year Primary or Elementary courses. Recognizing that social isolation can also be a factor when considering a training center, we have offered three of these scholarships at each level.

We know this is just a start, but we are heartened by the response of the students in our program who have stated that they feel more confident about their role in helping create a more just, peaceful world, where all feel welcome, safe, and wanted! We have more to learn and will continue to read and listen and draw on the expertise of others in our community and beyond.

Jennifer Wyld, Course Assistant at Montessori Northwest has AMI Elementary and Adolescent training and AMS Secondary I training, as well as a PhD in Free-Choice Learning from Oregon State University.



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What we've learned, and what we're learning

Steps along the way of the journey



BY ELISE HUNEKE STONE

I was feeling pretty positive about everything, including the equity and diversity work that was happening on the AMI 6-12 course, my ninth as Director of Elementary Training, with my new course assistant, Jennifer Wyld (an experienced Montessori elementary and adolescent teacher with a PhD in Free-Choice Learning from Oregon State University). I was offering the 6-12 legacy course and materials, preserved, sanctioned, and updated by AMI, with the addition of my own 20 years of classroom experience. Jen was guiding the group in regular short readings, discussions, and activities on social justice, current events, and the social realities of modern childhood.

Although I wasn't able to participate in most of the discussions, I did all the reading Jen offered to the students, and more on my own. I re-read all of my

Connecticut's State Education Resource Center (SERC), a quasi-public agency established to support educational equity and excellence

Here in Portland, educators at the Confluence Project (a local nonprofit connecting people to the Columbia River through indigenous voices) inspired me to seek more ways to bring those voices into the classrooms where my students would eventually teach. I conducted exams for new elementary teachers finishing a MACTE training at Libertas School of Memphis, a Montessori school in an economically challenged black neighborhood, in part so that I could begin to understand what Cosmic Education would look like in settings very different from the ones where I have worked myself. I made plans to attend the Montessori for Social Justice conference this summer.

The students on the course were getting most of their work in on time, practicing collaboratively with the materials, supporting each other, creating stories, and preparing themselves for written and oral exams. Their first practice teaching session went well. I presented the "People of the Zones" charts in the Work of Water, with their anachronistic and stereotypical depictions of human beings all over the world, and the stu-

teaching to the students on the course—without practicing it, modeling it, or professing it myself.

And in a way, I was taking refuge in the legacy of the AMI training. Dr. Montessori wouldn't have wanted her work to be fossilized—she would have wanted it to stay lively, pertinent, contemporary. She wanted the elementary children to see themselves—and all human beings—as cosmic agents, free and responsible in the world. A lesson or a chart or a story that didn't help the children "find the center of [themselves] in all things" would not be useful or relevant.

And if the teachers don't see themselves in the material, how can the children? It was an epiphany. I have always believed I had served the 6-12 children of earlier decades very well, offering a cosmic vision of the universe, the earth with its interdependencies, human beings with our special gifts and profound responsibilities. But though I had

recognized the eventual autonomy of my students, and the value of the diversity and inclusion work we were doing, I had, until I heard that student, thought of the learning in terms of something we were doing that was good for them. Now I recognize that becoming a culturally responsive educator myself is one of the most meaningful ways to support equity and diversity. Now I am committed to being the change I hope to see in my students.

Elise Huneke Stone is the Elementary Director of Training at Montessori Northwest in Portland, Oregon.

I was giving the responsibility for culturally responsive teaching to the students—without practicing it, modeling it, or professing it myself

theory lectures and album introductions with an eye for bias. And I found some, just as previous examinations of my work had revealed instances where I was not inclusive of non-binary gender, neurodiversity, children living in poverty, and more. The songs we sing every morning in class came in for similar scrutiny; some of them no longer feel appropriate, and others need an introduction and a cultural context to be respectful of those who first sang them.

I've been continuing my educational journey. I learned so much in an intense two-day workshop in Hartford, Connecticut, presented for the North American AMI teacher trainers, led by

dents quickly recognized and claimed their agency in adapting the images for their own communities.

And then, an overheard remark from a student this spring gave me a new perspective. I can't even remember the occasion—it was outside of class, there was a guest speaker of some sort, and I heard my student say something like, "It's a good thing when your trainer says, 'Feel free to adapt this chart so that you're comfortable using it with the children in your community.' But it's not the same as if she'd said, 'We changed this chart so that any guide could use it for all children.'" In a way, I was giving the responsibility for culturally responsive



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Measuring lesson-giving equity

A new record-keeping tool could help close gaps before they open



BY MICHELLE BOYLE
AND JEREMY LIGHTSMITH

“Among the revelations the child has brought us, there is one of fundamental importance, the phenomenon of normalization through work. Thousands and thousands of experiences among children of every race enable us to state that this phenomenon is the most certain datum verified in psychology or education.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*

But how can children reach normalization if they’re not offered the work in the first place?

In our practice as Montessorians, we strive to see and support each child in our care. We observe, take notes and experiment with our presentations. We look for a child’s interest and use that as the key to connecting them to the world.

We inevitably discover experiences of inequality and hardship. In response, we prepare ourselves and our classroom environments as best we can to meet

them. Often the assessment is too late, not capturing the right metric, and not actionable by the teacher. We need the right information at the right time.

This challenge inspired Genevieve D’Cruz, a Montessori Coach at Lee Montessori Public Charter School in Washington, DC, to start measuring equity by manually tracking presentations by gender, background, and ethnicity. She wanted an early indicator, to share with her team of guides and coaches, of how her community was serving different groups of children.

Genevieve saw the potential for this approach to be automated inside of Transparent Classroom, her online record-keeping platform. Her next step was to share her work with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS) and Transparent Classroom. This led Elizabeth Slade at NCMPS to organize a larger collaboration. Elizabeth assembled a group of 20 Montessori guides, administrators and coaches to sit down with Transparent Classroom during the NCMPS Public Montessori Symposium in March. The initial meeting was a brainstorming session about Genevieve’s work and what it might look like in an online record-keeping platform such as Transparent Classroom.

We wish you could have been there. Questions and ideas flew around the group.

“What if that report also let a guide group by IEP or SPED?” “What if this report could land in a guide’s inbox at the start of each week?” “What if guides

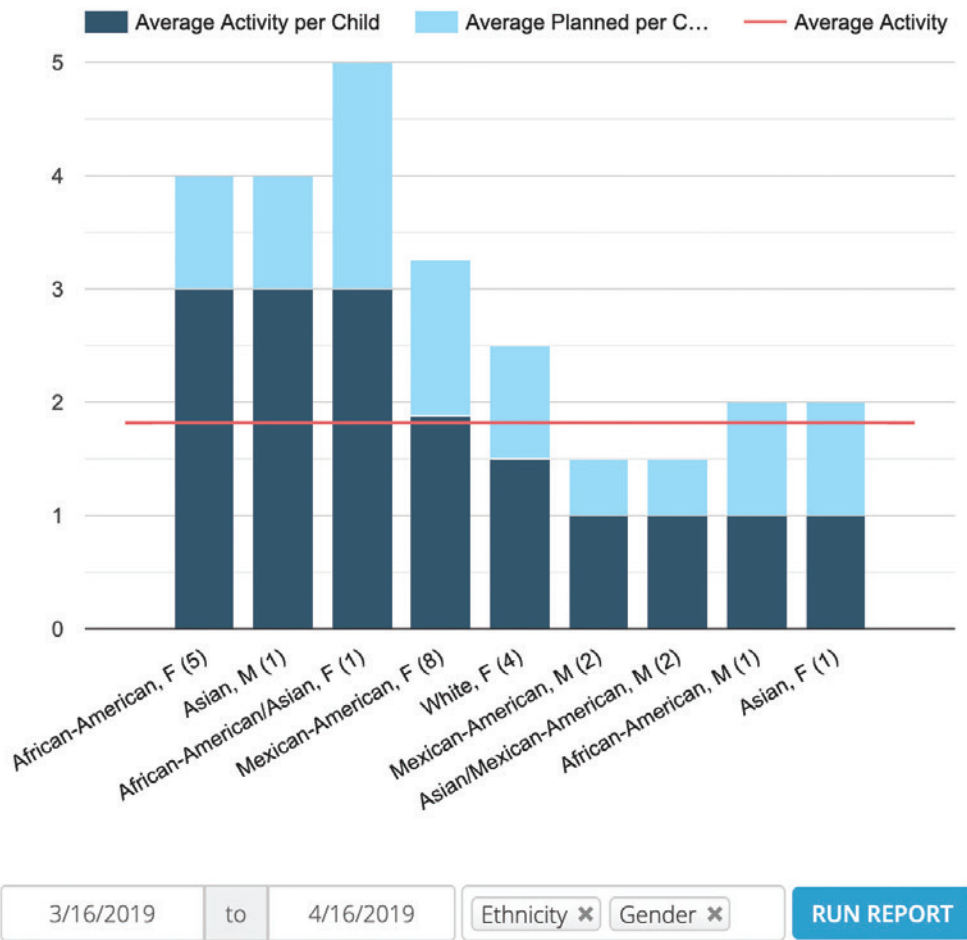
What started off as a small idea could have an impact on thousands of classrooms around the world seeking equity

the needs of our community. But at the end of the day, we are often left wondering if it will be enough to fill the opportunity gap.

The so-called “achievement gap” was uncovered by academic assessments. But summative, standardized assessment has proven incomplete in capturing a true picture of the whole child, and it can’t tell us much about how where “gaps” came from or what to do about

could receive push notifications that told them when a group was being underserved?” There was so much wisdom and passion in that room, just looking for a place to go.

When we struggle alone with big, complex problems like equity, we often feel overwhelmed and tempted to give up. When we come together with others that share our passions, we find solidarity and strength; our solutions and ideas



What do the data tell you, and what will you do with it?

can take flight.

An idea did fly. In the days that followed, Transparent Classroom worked with Genevieve and others to draw sketches, answer questions, and further refine what the first small piece of this grand vision might look like.

Arriving from the hearts and minds of this community of practice, an Equity Report is now available in Transparent Classroom. It shows all the lessons given to children in a classroom, grouped by gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or grade. Planned lessons are overlaid to show how upcoming lessons will impact the distribution of activity. If you use Transparent Classroom, please check it out and let us know what you think.

Releasing this report is only the first step. The Montessorians who met after the Symposium have volunteered their time and energy to continue evolving this and other features supporting equity in the public sector in partnership with Transparent Classroom. We are considering extensions such as showing the data for all classrooms in a level, adding tags like IEP/SPED, and more proactively putting the information in this report in front of guides.

Our group will continue meeting

regularly to make improvements to this report and to dream up other features that will advance equity in the classroom. If you want to be part of this conversation, let us know at michelle.boyle@public-montessori.org.

A coach observed a need, took steps to address it herself, and rallied others around her cause. What started off as a small idea could now have an impact on thousands of classrooms around the world seeking equity for their children. We all have the power to make a difference. We invite you to join us in working to better build a more equitable future for our children.

Michelle Boyle holds an AMS Primary credential and a conventional teaching credential, and co-founded the first public Montessori charter school in Memphis, Tennessee.

Jeremy Lightsmith is the creator and co-founder of Transparent Classroom, a digital Montessori record-keeping tool.

Equity, access, and curiosity

How can Montessorians best engage with communities of color?



BY **ANDREA JOHNSON**

“That which you do for me, without me, is not for me.”

We may think of this inspirational quote as a guiding mantra to remember as we assist our young students in the cultivation of independence. But did you know that this is also a powerful insight that can guide us in establishing a legacy of equity and access to Montessori education?

I live in a city of contrast—Charlotte, North Carolina—where “equity” and “access” are high frequency, haunting words. In 2014, Harvard researchers studied 50 of the largest U.S. cities in terms of upward mobility: one’s ability to climb out of poverty (“Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography

that there are far too many children of color (in particular), who will never experience a Montessori education. If you asked any of us to define the terms of “equity” and “access”, you would most likely get varying definitions but a general agreement that equity in education is a goal everyone in education can get behind. Equity requires putting systems in place to ensure that every child has an equal chance for success. That requires understanding the unique challenges and barriers faced by the individual students and communities that we serve and providing additional supports to help them overcome those barriers. This does not mean we will ensure equal outcomes but we all should strive to ensure that every child has equal opportunity for success.

In research published in the *Journal of Montessori Research*, Mira Debs and Katie Brown outlined several challenges facing public Montessori Schools in a 2017 paper, “Students of Color and Public Montessori Schools.” They explored the experiences of these students and found that our method offers both opportunities and limitations for students of color in attending diverse

provide opportunities. Building equity and access calls for adventurous problem solving and begins with recognizing our posture. How we come into the communities of color that we serve requires engagement. Access is a two-way street and the way we enter a conversation to understand the challenges and barriers of the marginalized is important. For the parents we serve, the neighborhoods we desire to root in, or for the staff member we are quite different from, it is essential that we sit and listen before moving in with our project, committee, new school, business or training plan. It is very disingenuous to attempt to address a problem that we are not curious about and that we haven’t taken the time to understand.

In Charlotte, the center I work at is currently under threat of being pushed out because of gentrification. Our movement is grassroots and canvassing the community door to door to meet young moms has been interesting and challenging. I was angered recently to learn about the large developer that quietly acquired half of our community homes by purchasing them under the names of different LLCs. After they purchased those homes, they demolished them and built new ones and renamed half of the neighborhood. These homes then became available to majority race families and soon had a patrol walking through it at night. It was so angering! Caring for the welfare of our city and the dignity of the people in my neighborhood required that I gather details from Ms. Sharelle, the president of the neighborhood association. I spent hours trying to analyze, dissect, and try to understand the issues surrounding this takeover. It took a lot of courage to wait for information when all I wanted to do was protest!

Equity is a balancing of the scales, which requires that we seek the welfare of the cities that we serve. For many people in our cities, they are balancing heavy loads of weight with forces of gravity that we may never know. What will be in our hearts as we attempt to access and engage them? Are we bound and determined? Concerned for our tasks? Coming to take? Enforce? Gain? Establish? We will find strength and promise when we access each other in dialogues with sensitivity, humility, and being curious about the challenges we face.

Montessori is a true gift and will impact needed communities with equity

when we posture ourselves as invited partners, remembering, “That which you do for me, without me, is not for me.”

Andrea Johnson is the Founder and Vision-keeper with the Montessori Seeds Academy in Charlotte, North Carolina.



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It’s essential that we sit and listen before moving in with our project, committee, new school, business or training plan

of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States,” in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*). The city of Charlotte ranked dead last (50th out of 50). This means that for a child born in poverty in Charlotte, it is harder to get out of poverty than in any other large city in the United States. Referred to as the Upward Mobility Study, it revealed that Charlotte is a city geographically divided by race and ethnicity, income inequality, family structure, social capital, and education. At the same time, we also made the U.S. News & World Report’s 2018 Best Places to Live in the United States, complete with the five best suburbs to live.

We have four public Montessori schools here as well as ten private programs, each working very hard to serve our parents and families, despite the fact that we recognize the dismal reality

schools, developing executive functions, achieving academically, accessing early childhood education, culturally responsive education, and minimizing racially disproportionate discipline.

Leaving a legacy with students of color may be a struggle for public Montessori programs because of the lack of diversity of the teaching staff and the gentrification of public and charter school enrollment. In addition, it can be a challenge to communicate benefits to families of color who have may be suspicious of Montessori schools because they may feel that their child will have too much freedom and not be held academically accountable. These perceptions may be due to distrust that we do not deliver an academically rigorous and culturally responsive education.

These are sturdy challenges that also

At Crossway, equity is a family affair

An interview with CEO Kathleen Guinan

BY NCMPS STAFF

Crossway Community, a residential educational program for women and their young children in Kensington, Maryland, opened in 1990 as a wrap-around center, integrating an innovative adult education initiative, a Montessori-inspired early childhood program, and a community center.

Since 1992, when Kathleen Guinan became the CEO of Crossway, she and her team have been applying Montessori theory and practice to implement a revolutionary approach to social change. The program builds social capital through intergenerational learning. For two decades the organization has operated an educational program for families living on the campus, while also serving diverse families from throughout the region through high quality early education and a vibrant community center.

NCMPS was able to sit down with Guinan to ask a few questions about the mission and vision driving her work. *(This conversation has been lightly edited for clarity and concision.)*

NCMPS: Conversation within the Montessori world has recently turned quite emphatically toward issues of equity, social justice, and social reform. And Crossway has been engaged in the work, now, for decades. Can you say a bit about what makes Crossway's approach to equity unique?

Guinan: We're not trying to add an equity lens to Montessori. In fact, we



Kathleen Guinan

direction. Do we provide housing assistance to families who need support? Yes. But we're not a homeless shelter. Do we help families who are facing challenging circumstances, which may involve trauma or substance abuse or early pregnancy or domestic abuse? Of course, but we don't view these families as dysfunctional. We work with—in partnership with—parents and children who need support. And, let's be honest, all of us need help.

NCMPS: Why is a multi-generational approach so important?

Guinan: Early in my career—even before Montessori—I came in contact with Murray Bowen and his work at Georgetown University. What I learned is that we all function as part of relationship systems, and extended families are the primary system for humans. In other words, families are where we all first learn what it means to be in relationship. And healthy or unhealthy relationships can set the course for our

parents, who are connected to their parents, and all are connected in various ways to extended families. We cannot, in other words, rescue children from their families. Lots of approaches to poverty amelioration attempt to do that, and that's not a recipe for success.

At Crossway, we work together with parents to help them better understand their own family system – not just what's challenging about it, but, more important, what's working. Who are the people she can count on? How can she establish meaningful connections, and keep the relationships active as a form of support? How can she better manage difficult relationships? Disconnection can sometimes be the main way people cope with relationship challenges, but what we have learned is this sort of “cut-off” is actually even more damaging

anthropology, psychology, peace—and thinking about one without the other is a recipe for failure. Montessori gives as a wide, science-based, vision of how human development takes place and what we, as adults, can do to support it optimally. For Montessori, the system is the universe. For Bowen, the system is the family.

NCMPS: Similarly, asset versus deficit-based approaches are central. Can you say more about why a resource—as opposed to treatment-based—model is so important?

Guinan: When we talk about interrupting generational cycles of poverty, we are not talking about “fixing” broken people. That's the treatment model. Poverty is not a pathology. It's a complex con-



The foundations of a healthy family system

and alienating, and can lead to other, destructive attempts at coping.

As adults, learning how to manage relationships is crucial to taking control of our lives. At the same time, the families who are part of Crossway Community include parents who are in relationship with their children. And when we see our children thrive, we are—all of us—inspired. Our Montessori environments show parents what's possible.

NCMPS: Can you talk about why systems thinking matters in this work? What are some ways it shows up in practice at Crossway?

Guinan: Maria Montessori was a systems thinker. So was Bowen. Both got that all things are connected—biology,

condition that produces cascading negative effects. Hunger, homelessness, a lack of basic security leads to anxiety, hopelessness, and desperation. The kind of stress that results from those physical and psychological conditions, particularly if there is no buffer, produces long-standing negative impact, especially on developing children. Our approach—which is both the Montessori approach and the Family Systems Approach—is to assist the family in re-setting their lives so that they can become a source of support in a community. The fuel is the love that parents have for their children.

Kathleen Guinan is a social justice activist, community organizer, and the CEO of Crossway Community.

We're applying Montessori theory to a systems-based practice of social reform

think that's a backwards way to think about the work of social change. We're applying Montessori theory to a systems-based practice of social reform. We focus on potential, prosperity, and sustainability—and our practice is centered on the family.

Lots of programs that do work similar to ours think of themselves as ameliorating poverty. We don't. That's a deficit orientation, pointed in the wrong

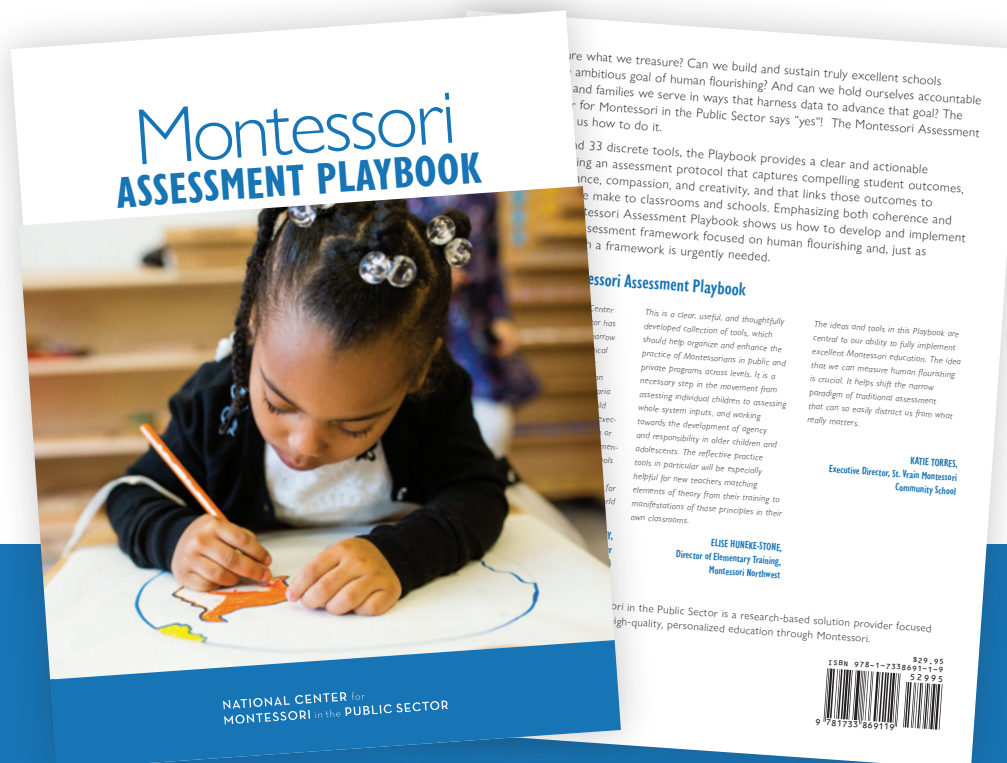
lives. The women who come to us are from all races, classes, and cultures. We have women who have masters' degrees, women who have been trafficked, women who are refugees. What they all have in common is relationships.

So, what does that mean in practice? It means that no single part of the system can be effectively supported without considering the system as a whole. Children are always connected to their

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Jones and Wafford: Equity at the root of Montessori

continued from page 1

of standardized testing discusses Lewis Terman's influence on standardized testing as a pernicious "social sorting" tool. In fact, Terman's work was fueled by explicit racism. From his 1916 book, *The Measurement of Intelligence*:

"Black and other ethnic minority children are uneducable beyond the nearest rudiments of training. No amount of school instruction will ever make them capable citizens. Their dullness seems to be racial."

"Children of this group should be segregated into special classes and given instruction which is concrete and practical. They cannot master abstraction, but they can make efficient workers."

"There is no possibility at present of convincing society that they should not be allowed to reproduce, although from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their prolific breeding."

What in our history allowed this story to exist? How are perspectives like these perpetuated today? What allows these ideas to continue in our Montessori environments? What do we have to actually dismantle in order to counter biases that permeate our

Academic equity is a loaded term, even (especially?) in a Montessori environment.

schools and the hearts and minds of educators and children? Montessori educators and administrators alike must be in dialogue about assessments while unpacking the inner work that we must commit to in order to even have productive conversations regarding what to do about assessments and data. NCMP has begun this work and is creating philosophy-centered support systems. But questions remain: Who are the people that will actually use these tools? How have they been prepared? What people are finding the most success in their proper implementation?

Equity in Montessori assessment

Academic equity is a loaded term, even (especially?) in a Montessori environment. Equity is at the root of Montessori. The method itself was born through work with children with special needs, and refined by responding to the needs of children in a low income housing project. Individualization and differentiation are intrinsic to the method. It would be easy to say that Montessori is, by its nature, education for peace, and so by practicing the pedagogy, we are inherently practicing equity, but the reality is much more complicated.

Now, one hundred years after Montessori founded her first school in Rome, we are attempting to deliver high-quality Montessori education to children of diverse educational, cultural, and economic backgrounds, some of whom have had interrupted education, and many of whom did not start with us at age three. We live in a country where our schools are judged by children's performance on standardized tests, not by their ability to concentrate and follow their interests. What does academic equity even mean in this context? Does it mean every student reaching grade level? Every student achieving growth? Every student being given the skills needed for self-determination? Some combination of the above?

Standardized assessments do not give us a full picture of students' abilities, and definitely are not a descriptor of who they are. However, in a world where performance on tests determines entry into college and possibly professional success, it would be a disservice to our students, especially our low-income students and students of color, to poorly prepare them for that reality and to fail to teach them how to show their skills in the way that will be required of them. As we grapple with how to meet that need without sacrificing the Montessori philosophy, there are three main areas to question: the assessments, ourselves, and Montessori itself.



What does she know? What can she do?

Question assessments

It is important to really understand that the problem of bias is multifaceted and continues to impact how we approach Montessori assessments and data collection broadly. There are several weighty questions that we must explore openly and answer truthfully.

Content: What decisions are made about the content of our assessments, and who is making them?

Standardization: What decisions are being made about the population for whom the test is appropriate?

Test administration: Are administrators familiar with the patterns of language, behavior, and customs of students being examined?

Validation: Are the tests accomplishing what they were designed to accomplish?

"Standardized" tests require all test takers to answer the same questions (or a selection of questions from a common bank), under the same conditions. Tests must then be scored in a "standard" or consistent manner. Ideally, this makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students across schools, districts, and states. Is this an even realistic aim? Understanding when and for whom this type of test is best suited is extremely tricky, especially when the children are from a different culture than the test makers. What actually is standard, and who determines what exists within such a category?

Assessments that reflect a child's lived experiences and take into account their cultural perspectives and worldview are critical to getting a true sense of not only what the child knows but the various ways in which that knowing manifests in the world. The distinction here is finding the what while honoring the wide range of the *hows*. In many cases, students of diverse cultures and languages are being required to step outside of themselves in order to be successful on a test. As a consequence many students may simply choose not to learn. Teachers or assessment measures that do not respect children's own integrity and culture can cause a major loss of self. We have to intentionally look with a critical lens at test content. Language and framing matter, and the environment we build matters as well. All students need to see themselves reflected in the environment, need to feel at home in the environment. We know that real learning is impossible if children do not feel safe and loved.

Question ourselves

Given assessments that may be inherently biased in their design, it is even more important that we examine our own interactions with the students who need us the most, and our framing of the work that we have taken on. Culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings insists that "a focus on the [achievement] gap is misplaced. Instead,

we need to look at the ‘education debt’ that has accumulated over time. This debt comprises historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components.” She similarly suggests that we discard the term “at risk,” pointing out that students who have been “saddled with” this label since their first day of school cannot reasonably be expected to “proudly wear it” and succeed.

Question Montessori

Montessori is a philosophy, and in order to best serve our students, we need to question how we implement it. Montessori education can be defined as support for adaptation to the world. Primary students adapt to the physical world, and elementary students adapt to the sociocultural world. We are very proud of the “window into the world” our curriculum offers to the students. While this is truly valuable, we must also question what world we are asking our children to adapt to. Often, it is a white-normative, Christian-normative, heteronormative, majority culture version of the world. Do all of our children feel valued in classrooms that don’t necessarily reflect their home culture? Do

our children need to leave their “home selves” at home, or is that part of them welcomed and celebrated in the classroom? Are children able to connect what they are learning to their greater life experiences? How do microaggressions and institutionalized bias affect their experience?

Do our children need to leave their “home selves” at home, or is that part of them welcomed and celebrated in the classroom?

Equity beyond assessment

Even if all of our students do feel valued, represented, and safe within their classrooms, there are still many difficult implementation questions that we must grapple with. How do we support students who are new to Montessori and “behind?” What does Montessori look like for diverse learners? How do we build academic skills and executive

functioning simultaneously? The “short game” for schools is to make sure that their students pass the tests so that they can stay open and continue to do the work. However, the long game is digging into the Montessori philosophy to determine how to face these new challenges without compromising the pedagogy. It

that students can maximally benefit from the curriculum. It means learning about trauma-informed care, and reaching out to our students’ communities, so that we can meet them where they are, instead of expecting them to come to where we are.

This is big work. This is likely to be a work in progress for a long time. But when all of our students are learning, valued, and well-served in their classrooms, we can truly call our pedagogy education for equity, justice, and peace.

Allison Jones, MEd, is Child Study lead at Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School, in Washington, D.C. She holds AMI Primary and Elementary diplomas.

Maati Wafford, MSW, holds AMS Early Childhood, Lower Elementary, and Administration credentials from the Institute for Advanced Montessori Studies.



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Equity Collaborative: Advancing equity in Public Montessori

continued from page 1

To continue to help public Montessori reach its fullest potential, a group of us embarked on a journey together this year called Advancing Equity in Public Montessori. We are trying to unlock how to fully implement Montessori in a way that ensures equitable outcomes for all children.

In partnership with the nonprofit organization Transcend, Montessori For All convened this group of public Montessorians with the hope that deeper, intentional collaboration would help us more urgently find solutions that help Montessori reach its fullest potential. Participants in our Advancing Equity in Public Montessori include Montessori guides and administrators from Magnolia Montessori For All in Austin, Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School in DC, City Garden Montessori School in St. Louis, The Montessori School of Englewood in Chicago, and Stonebrook Montessori in Cleveland, as well as trainers and staff from Capitol Region Education Council—The Montessori Training Center Northeast and the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

We began our collaboration by grounding ourselves in the state of equity and inequity in public Montessori schools, and we shared strategies that each of us are developing and using to

were tremendous similarities among our schools. Next, we heard updates about learning science from national experts. Dr. Nicole Evans, Principal at City Garden, helped us explore what it means to look at our work through an anti-bias, anti-racist lens based on the deep and profound work that has been going on at City Garden Montessori School for more than a decade. We surfaced trends and generated key insights for what children need most. From these insights we crafted questions to give direction to our problem-solving, such as:

- How might we ensure that all children in the elementary classroom are engaging in Great Work while mastering standards?
- How might we ensure children receive the intervention and support they need to meet grade-level outcomes?
- How might we better ensure children new to Montessori in kindergarten receive the support they need to meet grade level expectations and be prepared for Lower Elementary?
- How might we more explicitly teach social-emotional skills through the Montessori curriculum rather than layering on separate programs?
- How might we intentionally support the develop of our children's cultural identities?
- How might we support guides to ensure all children are on track to meet grade level expectations?

Our children are incredibly resilient, brilliant, joyful, kind, curious, and engaged

advance equity in our respective settings.

We leveraged Design Thinking—which is a way of thinking and working that uses a collection of hands-on methods to help people tackle big problems—to imagine, develop, test, and iterate on new resources and strategies to advance equity in our settings.

The process began by conducting empathy interviews and observations at our respective schools to better understand the strengths, needs, hopes, and desires of the children and families in our communities. We then combined insights gathered from our interviews and observations and realized there

Through in-person convenings and follow-up video conference conversations, we developed, tested, and iterated on several new resources, including lesson planning and intellectual prep guidance, a sample schedule and planning guidance to help ensure all children are receiving enough intervention, a toolkit clarifying different types of follow up work, a truncated scope and sequence for kindergarteners new to Montessori, ideas about how to embed social-emotional learning in our history albums, a process for building identity affirmation groups, and a primary assessment/observation system that aligns grade-level



Amy Willems, Allison Jones, Yolanda Romanelli, and Rita Nolan discuss challenges within public Montessori

outcomes with observations of children using Montessori materials.

It has been incredibly energizing to work collaboratively with public Montessorians to tackle our common challenges. Jacqui Miller, founder and Principal at Stonebrook, expressed that she was honored to participate in this work and how satisfying it felt to be part of a democratic process with people who are truly dedicated to the success of children of color in our public Montessori environments.

Our major takeaway from our work together is that many of us in public Montessori programs need more resources, tools, training, and ongoing coaching in order for us to operationalize Montessori and implement it in a way that leads to equitable outcomes for all children.

Another key takeaway is that as we work to create these tools and resources, we will go farther, faster if we work in collaboration. We all face similar challenges, and yet we each bring unique perspectives and ideas to contribute to the solution. We are eager to continue our Advancing Equity in Public Montessori work next year and develop strategies and solutions to additional challenges, such as:

- The need to reduce academic disparities along socio-economic lines in math in Upper Elementary
- The need to ensure that all children graduate from Lower Elementary reading on grade level

- The need to ensure all kindergarteners enter first grade on track in reading

If you are interested in accessing the free, open-source resources that are created by the Advancing Equity in Public Montessori Collaborative, you can visit <http://montessoriforall.org>. If you are interested in joining Advancing Equity in Public Montessori for the 2019-20 school year, you can email hello@montessoriforall.org.

Dr. Nicole Evans and Sara Cotner will be presenting their work on Identity Affirmation Groups at the Montessori For Social Justice conference in Portland this June. Additionally, Montessori For All is hosting the next Public Montessori Educators of Texas conference in Austin on October 25 and 26, 2019, which will focus on Advancing Equity in Public Montessori. More information can be found at pmetconference.org.

It truly takes a village. There are amazing things happening in our schools that we can learn from each other!

The Advancing Equity in Public Montessori Collaborative is a diverse group of Montessorians and other educators and activists collaborating to further their shared mission.

D'Cruz: Measuring equity in Montessori communities

continued from page 3

of stereotyped groups, and see them individually, rather than generalizing traits to the entire group. Working against implicit bias is a practice and a habit to strengthen, and schools must support the adults doing this deeply personal work. Whether in the form of professional development presentations, workshops, individual conferences, small group meetings, or other methods, schools must take on the task of working against implicit bias and moving toward transformation. This cannot be optional work.

In *The Discovery of the Child*, Dr. Montessori wrote, “Teachers must be trained and schools transformed at the same time...it is necessary that they should be able to carry out these activities in the school.” She referred to experimentation and observation, but the principle can be applied to equity training as well. It is the responsibility of any Montessori school to actively work toward equitable experiences for its students. This includes training its teachers and helping them to become more aware of and counteract implicit

words, “data,” and “tracking,” are commonly tossed around. In Montessori spaces, those words have come to be feared and avoided.

But Dr. Montessori herself was a scientist. She observed children, wrote down observations, took data, and analyzed the results to unearth the method we use today. The steps of the method include questioning, doing research, constructing a hypothesis, testing it via experimentation, and analyzing the data. Analyzing data does not necessarily have to include standardized testing. Our way of tracking may be in the way we keep records, and our data might be our observations. However, we should allow room to consider that our implicit biases are likely affecting the way we record observations and track progress.

Dr. Montessori indirectly addressed this in *The Discovery of the Child*, stating, “When one is performing an experiment, he must for the time being rid himself of all his prejudices, even those that may be the product of his own particular culture and background.” We must address our implicit biases and then scientifically examine our results—not always in that order.

Awareness of our shortcomings may even highlight our blind spots and implicit biases

bias. This work also feels intangible; it is internal. One cannot look at another person and know their implicit biases. However, asking oneself questions about one’s beliefs and examining one’s own thought processes and conversations can be a way to measure whether transformation is happening.

Working on implicit bias can be intangible and internal. But there are ways to visibly measure whether we are providing an equitable experience for children. As Montessori practitioners in a public setting, many if not most of us are required to use measures such as state-mandated standardized and testing to gather data about our children. We choose to work in practice, not policy, and so our work is to dance the line between keeping a public Montessori space open and funded, and giving the children an authentic Montessori experience. In conventional spaces, the

One way to do this is to look at the student breakdown in our classrooms, and examine how much time we spend with each child. We could look at the racial and ethnic makeup of our classes, and examine records to see whether we are withholding specific materials from specific children due to our implicit biases. Are we spending less time with the children with IEPs, and is it due to them being out of the classroom, or to our own fears and assumptions? Are we giving the most presentations to the children who are normalized, though we know those not yet normalized need the most time with us?

We could look at lessons by area; are we giving fewer Practical Life lessons to males, and fewer Math lessons to females? Are we considering gender identity and non-conformity in the frequency with which we give lessons to children? This information could be



To understand, we must be able to see what is in front of us

gathered weekly to impact one’s own personal practice, and even monthly or quarterly to examine trends throughout the school. It can be difficult to see this data, especially if it is not as equitable as we think and hope it will be. Awareness, though, is the first step toward change; by seeing our shortcomings, they may even highlight our blind spots and implicit biases.

I implore those of you who work in public Montessori spaces, or spaces where data is discussed, to think of ways to systematically gather information about whether your students are being served in an equitable fashion. The systematic gathering of information does not require that the children

are suddenly put into a factory model, as that is exactly what we avoid in our practice. However, due to our own biases, we may not be able to truly understand what is happening in our classrooms unless we see it in front of us. The objective is not to create extra work and overburden staff, but to examine the ways we are tracking observations and planning lessons, and embed in it a way to be more aware of how we serve our children and communities.

Genevieve D'Cruz, MEd, is a guide at Lee Montessori Public Charter School in Washington, DC. She was a member of the founding staff at Lee and holds an AMI Primary diploma.

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Say yes: opening doors to Montessori

The time is right for a dramatic expansion



BY ANNIE FRAZER

This article is adapted from a keynote presentation given at the Southeast Montessori Collective's August conference.

I've been thinking and talking a lot lately about Montessori outcomes. Recent research, most notably from Dr. Angeline Lillard, suggests that Montessori education can interrupt the tight coupling between family income and a child's success.

This research has already helped our work in Georgia to strengthen and expand public Montessori so every family can access it. When I talk about outcomes, I can speak about our work in a shared language with educators across the state and nationwide.

But am I missing something when I seek to describe the outcomes of a Montessori education as though our work were the cause and the children's success, its effect?

Dr. Montessori called into question the idea, pervasive in her time and still at the foundation of our educational system, that the teacher is the cause of the child's learning. Montessori education is built on a different view of how a child grows to be an adult, and at its heart is the understanding that we, the teachers, are not the cause of the child's development. The child is guided by an inner teacher toward a goal mysterious to us, a fulfillment of her ultimate and unknowable potential. Our role is to remove the obstacles to that development, preparing an environment where the child's energy can flow freely and joyously toward its goal.

Late in her life, around the time when her decades of observations were coalescing into a theory of human development, Dr. Montessori became friends with a mathematician named Luigi Fantappiè. Fantappiè was exploring solutions to the more nuanced version of Einstein's equation, simplified as $E=MC^2$, and he came up with a whole range of solutions that interested Dr. Montessori greatly. These solutions implied that phenomena in the present

could have a cause in the future rather than in the past! In addition to viewing everything rippling out from some past event, we could see disparate events in the present converging toward some unknown future event or state of being—a pull from the future, to complement the push from the past.

Montessori was intrigued by this idea, which resonated with her lifelong observations of children. Her word for this kind of backwards causality was “finality”—the idea that the child is drawn toward the adult she will become. The spontaneous manifestations we see in children—the things they suddenly start doing with no teaching or instruction—she saw as a result of that pull from the future.

And if the future individual, the man or woman to come, can exert a pull on a child, what deeper futures might be drawing us forward? We now feel ourselves in a chaotic present, roiled by uncertainties in every direction. Conversations devolve into shouting matches; job loss and addiction paralyze whole communities; racist invective claims the mantle of respectability; and the sea creeps further up the shore.

Montessori education is designed for this. When we do our work well, our children grow up resilient, awake to the guidance of their inner teacher, and



Spontaneous manifestations

invented the concept of microloans for the very poor, calls it “A World of Three Zeros: zero poverty, zero unemployment, zero carbon emissions.” Thomas Berry calls it the Ecozoic Era: the time when humans will be present with the Earth in a mutually enhancing way.

But this future, though it may be calling to us and aiding our work, is by no means certain. Dr. Montessori said this: “The crisis we are experiencing is not the sort of upheaval that marks the passage from one historical period to another. It can be compared only to one of those biological or geological epochs in

and breed countless disease germs in his laboratories at will, uses this means of saving lives to spread devastating epidemics that will poison the earth, he will accomplish his purpose with the greatest of ease.”

If a positive future is indeed calling to us, the same way we see the future adult calling forth the child's development, there's no guarantee we will get there.

To move into such a future, every person's help will be needed. We need the child whose mother never learned to read; the child whose family can't afford tuition; the child who doesn't yet know how to use words instead of pushing. We need them to grow to adulthood with the full force of their will and intellect intact; with their desire for knowledge burning, able to listen to their inner guide and act from their authentic core.

I believe that our shared work is part of the emergence of a new pattern in the world, something much bigger than Montessori education but that we can make a contribution to. These are some of the things I see that I believe are connected to our work and to each other:

- I see a new awareness of the awesome power of children in their first six years of life, and a growing consensus, transcending political divisions, that support for young children grows a strong society.
- I see an insistence that decisions be driven by data, and that we not continue to go down paths that aren't working.
- I see a focus on communication and collaboration among organizations working to better the world—from the Montessori Leaders

And if the future individual, the man or woman to come, can exert a pull on a child, what deeper futures might be drawing us forward?

ready to engage with the endless work of repairing the world.

Dr. Montessori saw the great potential in children as the answer to the dangers facing humanity. In her view, children hold the key to a future in which humans support each other and play a positive role in the unfolding Universe.

And so I ask: isn't it possible that the work we are doing now to bring Montessori to more children is being called forth by the future possibility of a world where joyous and supportive human communities exist on a flourishing planet?

Various writers have sought to describe such a future. Mohammad Yunus, who

which new, higher, more perfect forms of life appeared, as totally new conditions of existence on Earth came about.

“If we do not appreciate this situation for what it is, we shall find ourselves confronting a universal cataclysm, mindful of the prophesy of the Apocalypse. If man remains earth-bound and unconscious of the new realities, if he uses the energies of space for the purpose of destroying himself, he will soon attain that goal, for the energies now at his disposal are immeasurable and accessible to everyone, at all times and in every corner of the Earth.

“And if man, who is privy to the secret of plagues and can control their causes

Collaborative in our own community to the Collective Impact model and other forms of collaboration now in use by diverse organizations worldwide.

- I see a global commitment to erad-

And we do have a lot to learn, as well as a lot to share. To serve every child, we need to learn from those who have studied adverse childhood experiences—the damage done to children by economic stress; hunger; the loss or incarceration

Dr. Montessori called into question the idea that the teacher is the cause of the child's learning

icating poverty and healing the planet's wounds, exemplified by the Millenium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations.

In line with this greater movement, the time is right for a dramatic expansion of Montessori schools and ideas. It's time for our model to serve many more children, especially those whose families have limited financial means. It's time for us to engage with the broader education community, generously sharing what we have learned about children over the last 100 years and also learning from the knowledge and observations others have gathered.

of a parent. We need to learn from those who have studied ways to create trauma-aware classrooms, where children affected by these experiences can find support and safety rather than suspension and expulsion. We need to learn from those who have studied ways to dismantle racism and build truly equitable organizations.

The time is right, and the environment has already been prepared for us by the Montessori educators of the older generation. Everywhere I go in education circles, I meet someone who was a Montessori parent, or a Montessori child, or whose niece or nephew went to

Montessori school. Each of these people has seen a child blossom in a Montessori environment. Now they are ready to help make Montessori accessible to all.

Even so, there are days when our work to strengthen and expand public Montessori feels too big, too fraught, impossible to move even an inch forward. But viewing this big work as undertaken in alignment with the call from a positive future helps me stay focused on the path and discern its evolving direction.

Of course I will continue to talk about outcomes, and to appreciate the cause-and-effect of Montessori opening doors for children. At the same time, I want to humbly acknowledge that the doors that open for our work are not just a result of what we've done or even of all the amazing work that came before us, but are also invitations from a future we don't yet see and can only barely imagine.

Annie Frazer is the founder and Executive Director of Montessori Partnerships for Georgia, a nonprofit that expands access to Montessori through a network of public and community-based Montessori schools.

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Angeline Lillard calls for radical reform

Revolution is not too strong a word



BY **DAVID AYER**

Prominent Montessori researcher Dr. Angeline Lillard has a powerful new piece in the journal *Educational Psychology Review*: “Shunned and Admired: Montessori, Self-Determination, and a Case for Radical School Reform.”

Educational Psychology Review is one of the “big five” educational psychology and often the top ranked. It publishes “integrative review articles, special thematic issues, reflections or comments on previous research or new research directions, interviews, and research-based advice for practitioners” and it provides “breadth of coverage appropriate to a wide readership in educational psychology and sufficient depth to inform the most learned specialists in the discipline.”

So it’s a place where well-established scholars pull together their knowledge on a topic and offer a broad view including directions for research.

Lillard’s question is an exceptionally well-framed version of one the Montessori world has struggled with over the decades: Montessori is a century-old, deeply-rooted, developmentally sound, sought-after, profoundly inspiring educational approach—why isn’t it better known?

The answer is 15,000 words of Lillard’s dense yet readable, restrained yet inexorable explication of Montessori she pioneered in her book, *Montessori—the Science Behind the Genius*, and some of the arguments here are extended to chapter length in the book. For the full treatment, the book is the best source, but I will try to outline the case, and the call for radical reform, here.

The first question is one you might not expect: Montessori has been “on the margins” for over one hundred years. It hasn’t caught on. So why is it still around? Lillard identifies extrinsic reasons, such as outcomes for children, teacher satisfaction, and parent demand, as well as intrinsic factors, such as the model’s coherence with developmental theory, and its breadth of scope.

Outcomes

When people asked us, “OK—where’s the research?”, we used to have to hem and haw and mumble some explanations about scale, selection bias, and alternate measures, to explain away the absence of “a stack of papers.” With the work of Lillard, Else-Quest, Culclasure, and others, and two multi-million dollar studies underway, we don’t have to do that any more. While recognizing the need for more and better research, Lillard says straight out that “evidence suggests that properly implemented Montessori education is very effective.” This is not the kind of thing one says lightly in peer-reviewed journal such as this one. (You can find more research at NCMPS.org.)

Teacher and parent satisfaction

Once teachers start with Montessori, they don’t want to stop. In the Culclasure study of 45 South Carolina public Montessori schools, teacher satisfaction rated 98%. Lillard suggests that the positive social climate, the three-year age groups, and student self-determination might drive this satisfaction (although there could of course be selection bias).

Since Montessori schools, private or public, are almost exclusively “choice” programs, they must be doing something that keeps families coming back. Lillard doesn’t quite come right out and say it, but of course it is families with privilege that are doing most of the choosing. If there’s something privileged families want for their children, you can bet that it’s something worth having, and worth distributing more equitably.

“Convergence with Developmental Science”

This is Lillard’s gracious way of saying that everything we know about how children learn, grow, and develop supports Montessori, even if she got there by observation, insight, and experimentation rather than double-blind randomized controlled trials.

First, she notes that Montessori’s work was based on observation of a wide range of children (with typical and atypical development; low-income and affluent) across a wide range of cultures, and arrived at the premise that education should be a help to independence.

Independence in the ed psych world is termed self-determination, and, as Lillard dryly suggests: “Abundant theory and empirical evidence suggest the

benefits of self-determination to the human psyche.” According to that theory and evidence, self-determination depends on choice and interesting, embodied, and interconnected activities to choose from. Such activities inspire deep interest which focuses attention and helps develop executive function. Organized, orderly environments support self-determination, which fosters good peer and adult relationships, and self-determination in social groupings allows for peer learning and collaboration.

All of the above is richly expanded upon and footnoted in the article, and in even greater detail in Lillard’s book. It’s enough to say that if Montessori didn’t exist, developmental psychology would probably have to invent it.

Scope

Finally, Lillard offers one more reason for Montessori’s surprising persistence: its remarkably broad scope. Unlike alternatives such as Waldorf or Reggio-Emilia, Montessori is a comprehensive, coherent approach applying the same principles of self-determination and independence from birth to adulthood. Montessori’s scope is as broad in

Drawing an analogy with cultural psychology, which views culture as a holistic system which can’t be separated from the individuals embedded in it, she suggests that bringing Montessori elements into conventional education and expecting Montessori-like results would be no more successful than bringing Western child-rearing and sleeping arrangements into Asian culture and expecting people in that culture to become more “Western”. Culture, in both Montessori and conventional models, runs deeper than that. Instead, what we often find when Montessori is incompletely applied is weak implementation which achieves the goals of neither model.

Revolution

It’s in the second-to-last paragraph of this dense, comprehensive, and thoroughly referenced essay that we find the call to action. Other alternative pedagogies have come and gone, yet Montessori has persisted, and remained largely unchanged. There must be something to the idea! But Montessori’s own strength and internal consistency (among other things) has kept it from changing the dominant educational paradigm, which

If Montessori didn’t exist, developmental psychology would have to invent it

geography and culture as it is in time, having been developed and practiced across more than 100 countries and diverse cultures. And within the scope of a single classroom in a single age range, Montessori addresses all aspects of development—physical, sensorial, practical, intellectual, social, and more. No other model casts as wide a net.

Challenges

So why is such a well-established, deeply theorized, scientifically convergent pedagogy not more widely adopted? (And what should be done about it?)

Lillard describes Montessori as “incommensurable” with conventional schooling. By this she means that Montessori is so different, in its aims, practices, and underlying philosophy, from conventional education, that its elements can’t be successfully incorporated without wholesale adoption.

is so uninterested or even opposed to Montessori’s core principle of self-determination.

Yet conventional education has persisted as well, perhaps in spite of itself. A nagging sense of dissatisfaction with the model’s inadequacies is revealed in the decades of tinkering and adjustments we’ve done, but the fundamental premises of the factory model, content delivery, and behaviorism remain the same. It has a consistent logic and culture of its own. It would take a wholesale dismantling and rebuilding, a revolutionary change, for Montessori to prevail in the education world.

But as Lillard suggests in the most powerful line in the piece, “Real school reform may require radical change.”

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

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Major Montessori landscape report from ETS

A new analysis points to opportunities and directions for research



BY DAVID AYER

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) has released a “Policy Information Report” on The Montessori Preschool Landscape in the United States. This comprehensive, detailed report is loaded with insights and recommendations for anyone interested in expanding access to Montessori early childhood education in underserved communities. (The ETS is “the world’s largest private nonprofit educational testing and assessment organization,” per Wikipedia, associated with the PSAT, the SAT, the GRE, the TOEFL, the PRAXIS, and numerous state assessment programs.)

One such person interested in early childhood Montessori is Jeff Bezos, with his Day 1 Academies Fund announced last fall: a \$1B fund to support “a network of high-quality, full-scholarship, Montessori-inspired preschools in underserved communities.” This is of interest to ETS partly because of the scale of the proposal: \$1 billion is roughly equivalent to the 2016-17 pre-K spending in four states (Florida, Oklahoma, Vermont, and Wisconsin, plus DC) which enroll 70%+ of their four-year-olds.

The report is pretty clearly directed at the Fund, offering to provide “insight into the fund’s pedagogical inspiration,” and help in defining “‘high quality,’ ‘Montessori inspired,’ and ‘underserved.’” But it will be useful to anyone who shares the broader mission.

Overview and inputs

This “high-level overview of the Montessori preschool landscape in the United States,” does a pretty good job, accurately, if broadly, identifying key elements of Montessori early childhood education, and the availability and demographics of programs. For context, it analyzes state-funded pre-K and federally funded Head Start programs. The report also reviews Montessori outcomes research and suggests useful directions for further inquiry.

The report begins with a concise yet

detailed history of Montessori up through its recent growth phase in the public sector. This out of the way, the report analyzes “programmable inputs” that may drive quality in Montessori programs, and compares them to public non-Montessori classrooms. Programmable inputs can be “structural,” such as instructional time and class size, or “process,” such as curriculum and interactions.

Structural inputs

Classroom composition (including three-year age groupings, larger class sizes, and higher child-to-teacher ratios) is identified as an essential Montessori practice promoting self-paced and peer learning, and strong adult-child relationships. This contrasts with smaller, single-age classrooms in state pre-K and federal Head Start programs, intended to support differentiated instruction and small-group instruction (which occur in Montessori classrooms as well).

“Montessori programs have been constrained from greater participation in state-funded pre-K initiatives”

Montessori **teacher training**, typically from non-degree-granting institutions, can focus exclusively on child development and the substantial body of specific skills required for implementation. But additional schooling is often required for teaching in public programs. Teachers trained in university settings, especially with special education coursework, felt more able to support special needs students. In addition, “the limited number of university-based Montessori teacher training programs has been cited as a challenge to training a more culturally and linguistically diverse teacher workforce.”

Process inputs

Both Montessori and conventional early childhood programs use **hands-on materials** to support learning and development—books, blocks, and easels in conventional models, and the Montessori materials in those classrooms. These are highlighted as meriting their own report, but are noted for “the manner in which

these didactic materials are used to sequentially teach concepts and work together as preparation for young children’s future development and learning.” The report traces the progression from Knobbed Cylinders through Metal Insets and Sandpaper Letters to writing in a way that will be recognizable to Montessorians and comprehensible to outsiders.

Student choice of activity within the Montessori environment is gathered under **the role of the teacher** as a process input, identified as a “pedagogical focus on following an individual child’s lead,” where “the teacher’s role is intentionally decentered in the learning process and thus limited to implementing the appropriate Montessori lesson that supports each student’s personal learning trajectory within a specific content area.”

This is a bit of a conflation of the adult-child-environment “triangle” model from within Montessori, minimizing the adult’s role in mastering and guiding a child through the deep,

comprehensive Montessori curriculum. Still, it’s nice to see some reference to independent choice in children’s work. And the report does a nice job differentiating Montessori from other curricula, which are aligned to age-specific knowledge and skill goals, rather than being derived from observation and developmental models.

Finally, the **use of data** is highlighted and as process input common to all the early childhood models in question. Montessorians might have preferred direct reference to observation and record-keeping as a primary data collection mode for our classrooms, but it’s good to see our data-aware approach recognized and validated.

Who has access?

Availability: The report explores what “underserved” might mean in the context of Montessori and other ECE programs. Using Montessori Census data, the study comes away with several key insights:

- Every state has at least one

private Montessori primary program.

- Half of all 3-6 programs are in seven populous states: California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas
- Eleven states have just one or two public 3-6 programs.
- Thirteen states have none.

The Montessori Census lists 326 public programs (out of 518 total) serving ages 3-6, but it’s difficult to tell how many of these actually serve three and four year-olds—only 71 of these schools have confirmed serving the full age group. (This is another important reason for schools to claim and update their Census profiles at montessoricensus.org.) Although some states have approved a Montessori curriculum for state funded pre-K, and it is theoretically available to Head Start programs, the report notes that “Montessori programs have been constrained from greater participation in state-funded pre-K initiatives,” citing class size, teacher-child ratio, and teacher degree and licensure regulations.

Enrollees: How many children might be served by an expansion of Montessori ECE, and who are they? The report had difficulty in counting current enrollees, but extrapolating from the Montessori Census data so far collected, the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector estimate about 45,000 children are enrolled in public Montessori 3-6 programs.

By contrast, state pre-K enrolls about 1.5 million children nationally, and Head Start another 700,000. Demographic data are hard to come by, although they are most likely from lower-income, lower wealth families.

The data are similarly elusive for Montessori, but generally the population in public Montessori has been reported to be similar within states to other public schools, but a bit whiter and wealthier on a district-by-district level. (This suggests that some or most Montessori schools in a given state maybe more affluent than average, and that a few larger ones are less so, making the districts less equitable but keeping the state average flat.) A new book by Mira Debs, *Diverse Families, Desirable Schools*, goes into much more detail on this subject.

The takeaway here is that there are many, many eligible children, quite a few of them in states with little to no Montessori availability.

Research

Research supports the value of high-quality preschool for so-called “at-risk” children. Research specifically on Montessori has been scarcer and harder to evaluate. The report’s exhaustive review came up with conclusions we’re familiar with—if there was really solid evidence out there, we’d already know about it. Here’s what the report found:

- Montessori programs have the potential to enhance young children’s learning and development
- But, results did not demonstrate a consistent advantage.

Conclusions

The report concludes with two observations and two recommendations.

First, both Montessori and high-quality state-funded pre-K and Head Start classrooms include programmatic inputs aimed at supporting young children’s learning and development.

Next, existing research does not yet unequivocally demonstrate the benefits of enrollment in traditional Montessori classrooms for children from families with low incomes.

Finally, access to public and private Montessori classrooms serving pre-school-aged children may be uneven

Half of all 3-6 programs are in seven populous states: California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas

The issues in the existing research were:

- Most studies used simple comparison samples instead of more rigorous random samples.
- Research including low-income families was limited.
- Some studies focused on school readiness, academic achievement, and executive function, while others focused on fine motor skills and activity levels.

Fortunately, two new large scale studies (see page 4) are addressing precisely these topics, so better support for Montessori should be available when they are completed. But it’s not surprising that the review concludes, “there appears to be a significant range of Montessori-related studies to be conducted through future short- and long-term.”

among states

Therefore, the report suggests directly to the Day One Academies Fund’s stakeholders:

- Short-term research examining current early education options of low-income families in potential low-access-to-Montessori states.
- Long-term research to expand the research base on the effects of Montessori programs aimed at pre-schoolers.

These seem like two of the right questions to be asking.

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



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Sums of 10 and Less than 10									
Spindle boxes	M								
Zero Game									

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New Release!

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We need your story!

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?

For the next issue, we're going to take a step back and take a broad look at the public Montessori story in the U.S.: Milwaukee, with its robust district Montessori schools—Cincinnati, first public Montessori in the country—Hartford's magnet program—Arizona, hothouse of charter school innovation—Texas, the wild west of district and charter. Tell us how public Montessori happened where you live!

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 Fall issue is **September 2nd**, 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

June 17–28

Foundations of Montessori Inclusion
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

June 20–23

Montessori for Social Justice Conference
DECOLONISING HUMAN POTENTIAL
PORTLAND, OREGON

July 21–August 1

Educateurs sans Frontières Assembly
TEPOZTLÁN, MEXICO

October 25–26

Public Montessori Educators of Texas Conference
ADVANCING EQUITY IN PUBLIC MONTESSORI
AUSTIN, TEXAS

November 7–10

Association of Illinois Montessori Schools
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

2020

February 14–17

AMI/USA Refresher Course
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

February 21–22


Association of Illinois Montessori Schools
LISLE, ILLINOIS
PRESENTATION PROPOSALS DUE MAY 31, 2019

February 21–22

Association of Illinois Montessori Schools
LISLE, ILLINOIS
PRESENTATION PROPOSALS DUE MAY 31, 2019

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

Deadline for the next issue: **September 2, 2019**.
Be sure to include the date, organization, event title, city and state
Email to: editor@montessoripublic.org

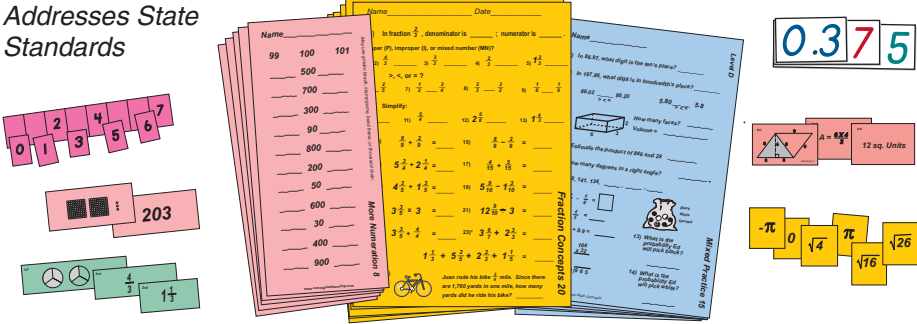


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