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How children learn to read: An overview

The wars are over the science is settled



BY CORFY BORGMAN AND ANGELINE LILLARD

A compelling and growing body of evidence supports Montessori as an educational approach that improves students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes while functioning as a lever for equity and educational justice.

Montessori outcomes have been particularly compelling and consistent for reading and literacy. For those who may wonder about the secret in the Montessori sauce, we can point to the fact that Montessori education has always been based on careful scientific observations of how children learn. For over a century, as mainstream educational

practice and policy has vacillated between phonics-based, whole-language, and balanced literacy approaches (to name a few), Montessorians have continued to base curricular and instructional decisions on empirical evidence.

It is no wonder, then, that as the volume rises on our national conversation around the science of reading, practitioners, researchers, and advocates are moving to highlight the longstanding alignment between Montessori literacy instruction and current understandings from cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and neuroscience. This article provides a brief overview of those understandings, offering the appropriate background knowledge to approach other contributions to this issue.

While definitive claims are rare in education research, findings related to reading science are an exception: four decades of research in both laboratory and field have been marked by widespread agreement amongst scientists and literacy experts as they work to build a model of reading acquisition.

A major takeaway from those forty years of scientific inquiry? That neither



A literacy-rich environment

phonemic awareness (the recognition of isolated speech sounds) nor decoding (the mapping of those sounds onto written symbols) are innate functions of the human brain. Alphabetic writing was invented a mere 3,800 years ago-nowhere near the scale of time required for the human brain to evolve in response.

This means that, whereas related brain functions like spoken language will develop fairly spontaneously within the context of an enriched environment, this is not the case with reading.

Instead, the neural networks relevant

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Montessori and the science of reading

How does Montessori align with what we know?



BY SUSAN ZOLL, LAURA SAYLOR, AND NATASHA FEINBERG

Recent legislation in several states requires many school districts to select and implement English language arts (ELA) curriculum that meets the ESSA "Tier I" standards—"strong evidence supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented randomized control experimental studies." ("Montessori as a

reading intervention", MontessoriPublic, November 2021)

Although substantial and growing evidence supports Montessori's effectiveness, at this time no Tier 1 evidence to support the Montessori reading curriculum exists. Without this level of rigorous study of Montessori classrooms, some publicly funded Montessori schools in states with science of reading legislative mandates now face having to implement supplementary ELA curriculum.

To inform future Montessori research initiatives, and to help Montessori teacher educators, administrators, and teachers themselves better understand contemporary reading research, we have written Powerful Literacy in the Montessori Classroom: Aligning Reading Research and Practice (Teachers College

Press, available December 2022).

Educators recognize that teaching reading successfully requires deep knowledge of the reading process and development, as well as the implementation of impactful reading instruction and differentiation to ensure all students' reading success.

Our research has aligned the Montessori didactic materials and pedagogy, developed over a century ago, with current research on reading development, showing that the "science of reading" and the Montessori language curriculum both follow a logical, systematic, and explicit progression of teaching and learning.

The phrase "science of reading" is

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Reading and communication



BY SARA SUCHMAN

My plan was to introduce this important issue of MontessoriPublic with a "truth" that we can all agree on: the primacy of reading in a child's development and education. But during the recent Diverse Perspectives in Montessori webinar from Loyola University, Trisha Moquino, Co-Founder/Education Director at the Keres Children's Learning Center, pushed back on my "truth": in indigenous cultures from millennia-old oral traditions, the spoken word and the skill of listening—not reading—are primary.

When I dig a bit and ask "why"—why do we care, why do we teach what we teach, why does it really matter?—what comes to the fore is the primacy of communication.

Recognized by Montessori as a fundamental human tendency, communication—being able to share our ideas and understand others'—is essential to our very being, survival, and flourishing, as humans, as cultures, and as civilizations. Are we willing and able to take the risk of truly understanding different perspectives? Can we infer meaning from others' stories? Can we deduce meaning from information? Are

we curious about origins, sources, intentions, and interpretations? This does not demote reading but, rather, stands it side-by-side with speaking, signing, writing, listening, creating, and viewing. It refocuses us from the act to the reason for the act.

While holding and raising the importance of all forms of communication, we see new legislation in several states requiring schools to choose supplemental reading programs from state-approved

If you are considering such a program, top of mind will be that not all programs are created equal when it comes to implementation in a Montessori classroom. Which programs can best be integrated into a self-paced work period? Offer students choice? Work in mixed age groups? Honor the developmental planes? Center diversity and belonging? Minimize competition and comparison? Preserve wonder? As we venture down this road together, let's be creative, share

Why do we teach what we teach, and why does it really matter?

lists, lists that may not, at the moment, include Montessori. We see other schools considering such adoption not in response to legislation, but to internal data. This topic matters. Any time there is a pressure to move Montessori away from its program (and there is always at least one, right?), it matters. And NCMPS's approach, each time, is to face the pressure head on, to meet the need or satisfy the requirement without disrupting the Montessori, all the while working with our partners at MPPI and throughout the Montessori community for a better long term solution. To that end, while the Montessori community works together on the teacher preparation, materials, and research that advance Montessori, your school may be one that is considering a supplemental curriculum.

what we discover, and learn how to meet this requirement while holding sacred each child's sense of self as an enthusiastic, independent, and capable learner.

So, yes, this issue is about reading. And it matters because reading is one way of communicating, and communication moves and motivates the human spirit in health, harmony, and peace. I hope the articles in this issue offer both mirrors and windows into your work, and wish for us all, through the stressors and pressures, to remember that at core what we are doing is nurturing children in meeting their essential human drive for communication.

Sara Suchman, EdD, is the Executive Director at the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

In this issue: The science of reading

This issue is about public Montessori and the "Science of Reading". We're grateful to the contributors to this issue, a group including classroom teachers, school leaders, academics, researchers, writers, each bringing a unique perspective and expertise. **We expect this conversation**

to grow in size and importance. Join it by emailing editor@montessoripublic.org

Corey Borgman and Angeline Lillard give us an overview of the science, and Susan Zoll, Laura Saylor, and Natasha Frishberg connect the science to Montessori. Sara Cotner, Kacee Weaver, and Linda Zankowsky take it to the school and classroom level.

Sara Suchman asks us to look at what really matters, while **David Ayer** wonders how Montessori could have a problem with reading in the first place. A map developed with help from the **Montessori Public Policy Initiative** shows a literal overview of the legislative and policy im-

pact of reading programs across the country.

In addition, Mira Debs reviews (via the Journal of Montessori Research) Erica Morettti's new Montessori book The Best Weapon for Peace, and David Ayer interviews NCMPS Board member Jared Joiner and reports on Wildflower Montessori's charter ventures.



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We think there's more to talk about here. If you think so too, reach out to editor@
montessoripublic.org

Our next issue will be in May, 2023.

More guidelines on page 23.

Who says Montessori can't teach reading?

Maybe we have something to learn here

BY **DAVID AYER**

When I first began to hear a narrative along the lines of "Montessori has a problem teaching reading," my first thought was, "How is this possible?" If there's one thing Montessori has a lock on (and there's much more than one thing), surely it's teaching young children to read. With its masterful blend of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction via the "Sound Game" (often called "I Spy") and the Sandpaper Letters-Moveable Alphabet sequence, along with the deeply embedded, culturally responsive literacy that begins the moment a three-year old enters a Montessori classroom for the first time, surely Montessori education bridges the divide between "phonics-based" and "meaning-based" education that has characterized the "Reading Wars" of the last century.

After all, the story of the "explosion into reading" observed in four-year-old children in Dr. Montessori's very first "Casa dei Bambini" in San Lorenzo in 1907 was widely reported in the contemporary press as a miracle, and played a major role in Montessori's early recognition and fame. And let's remember that these children were from communities we would today recognize as marginalized and under-resourced, not subjects of high expectations for literacy or education generally.

Now comes legislation in a dozens requiring schools to use reading curricula or interventions that are "evidence-based" and aligned with the "Science of Reading." Montessori is not well-represented in the evidence base or in the lists of acceptable curricula, and as a result public Montessori programs may face compromises to the integrity of their approach. The Reading Wars, it seems, have achieved a negotiated settlement, but without Montessori at the peace table.

The Reading Wars

The conflict over how to teach reading goes back to at least the 1970s, and really much further than that: Noah Webster

favored phonics, while Horace Mann supported what came to be called the "whole language" method. The lines are pretty clearly drawn. Phonicists believe (and the research supports them) that children learn to read best with explicit structured phonics instruction—even in a not-entirely-phonetic language such as English. (Non-alphabetic scripts, such as Chinese, present an entirely different challenge, obviously.) "Whole language" proponents characterized phonics instruction as over-emphasized and mind-numbingly boring, and argued that children can learn to read by saturation in a literacy-rich environment, using clues such as context, illustrations, and even word shapes. To be fair, studies have shown that *adults* recognize words faster than decoding would seem to allow, although this has not been found to generalize to children.

Decades of reading research came up mostly empty on the effectiveness of whole language instruction, and by the 1990s, with California leading the way, reading instruction moved back towards a phonics-intensive model. "Balanced literacy" also arose in the 1990s as an attempt to compromise between the perceived rigidity of intensive phonics and the "meaning-making" aspects of whole language, but the approach did not gain wide acceptance and has been criticized as unscientific.

The Reading Wars were arguably settled thanks to the scientific method. Researchers Philip Gough, William Tunmer, and Wesley Hoove advanced the "Simple View" of reading in 1986 as a testable hypothesis about the importance of decoding. Later work, notably Hollis Scarborough's "Reading Rope," demonstrated the importance of both decoding and comprehension for learning to read, and the "Science of Reading" as it is understood today is an extremely well-researched and documented model which integrates these ideas and which has shown great success in the classroom. You can read much more about the Science of Reading and its relationship to Montessori in the pages of this issue.

As you will discover in these pages, the Montessori curriculum does in fact do a very good job of building the skills necessary for learning to read and making reading and literacy deeply embedded and engaging elements of the classroom. There are some areas where improvement is possible of course—perhaps some more structured work with phonemes



Reading integrated into social life

and letters, possibly better, more systematic support for comprehension, reflection, and meaning-making, especially in 1st-3rd grades—but Montessori ticks a surprising number of boxes.

So why are public Montessori programs teaching reading with Montessori under threat?

I can see two reasons for this: one on the policy side, and one in Montessori.

On the policy side, what does it take to qualify as "evidence-based?" One gold standard adopted by many states and districts is the What Works Clearinghouse (ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/), a federal "trusted source of scientific evidence on education programs, products, practices, and policies." The WWC returns this result in response to a search for "Montessori":

As of December 2005, no studies of Montessori Method were found that fell within the scope of the Early Childhood Education review protocol and met WWC evidence standards. Therefore, the WWC is unable to draw any research based conclusions about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Montessori Method to improve outcomes in this area.

The WWC review protocols and evidence standards are rigorous, as they should be, calling (ideally) for large sample sizes and randomized control trials, and public Montessori is small, although growing fast, so it's not surprising that 17 years ago no studies could be found. But at this point it seems that some research could be found, or undertaken, that could fill this gap.

Certainly Dr. Angeline Lillard's ongoing multi-year federally-funded study of public Montessori could be brought to bear when the study is completed and published.

On the Montessori side, Montessori teacher training and classroom practice need to update their thinking to align with what one researcher has called "the most universally agreed on result in education research," as well as the expectations set for public school children by nationally adopted English Language curriculum standards. If the science suggests we should do something a little different with the Sandpaper Letters or the Sound Game, we should do it. We'll soon see if it makes a difference. If public Montessori elementary students will be asked to "describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges" (Common Core 2nd grade Literacy Standard RL 2.3) or "determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details" (4th grade Standard RI.4.2), we ought to teach them. If teachers don't have a lesson for that in their Elementary albums, they ought to be able to create one without straying from the central practice of Montessori, which is to awaken and inspire independent learning and discovery and to serve as "preparation for life."

So that's what this issue is about, and that's what's possible.

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

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Teaching with the science of reading



BY LINDA S. ZANKOWSKY

Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have passed laws or policies mandating that public schools ensure they are implementing the Science of Reading. One course of action is to require schools to choose from "core programs". A core reading program is a systematic approach that serves as a basis for teaching reading in all classrooms in a school; it may or may not be a commercial textbook series. The premise is that by implementing approved core programs with fidelity, schools will help more children become successful readers. But studies of the impact of core reading programs highlight flaws in this assumption. One study of comprehension instruction in the five most widely implemented core programs at the time found that:

The structure of the curricula is often incoherent so that students and teachers do not know how skills and strategies relate to one another or how acquiring these sets of skills leads to becoming a better reader... Core programs do not provide enough practice to ensure that any given skill will be learned... Finally, the core programs do not provide sufficient support or scaffolding so that students can learn to use these skills on their own (Dewitz et al., 2009).

Montessori teachers and school leaders are facing legislation and regulations which require them to adopt curriculum-centered rather than child-centered programs without clear evidence that this will improve children's reading performance. Core programs are typically structured by grade levels and come with expectations of how much time a teacher will spend on reading instruction. This impacts the culture of the multi-age classroom, the freedom of the 3-hour work period, and the potential for integrating reading and writing in the cultural curriculum.

Every Montessori teacher and school leader feels a heavy responsibility for

teaching children to read. Yet in my work with schools and teachers, it is evident that they feel woefully underprepared for this task. It is beyond the scope of this article but the Montessori teacher preparation community would do well to better support reading instruction.

For schools, we must maintaining the integrity of a child-centered Montessori classroom while we ensure that children have every opportunity to become successful readers. Montessorians can do this by focusing on what we know about effective teachers of reading while being open to the research that may challenge us to think beyond our Montessori bubble. The large body of research on effective teachers of reading tells us that these teachers:

- **1.** understand the **development** of reading
- **2.** use classroom-based **assessment** tools
- **3. use what they learn** to inform their instruction
- **4.** have a deep understanding of the **pedagogy of reading**
- **5.** create classrooms where **literacy is embedded** in all aspects of the curriculum

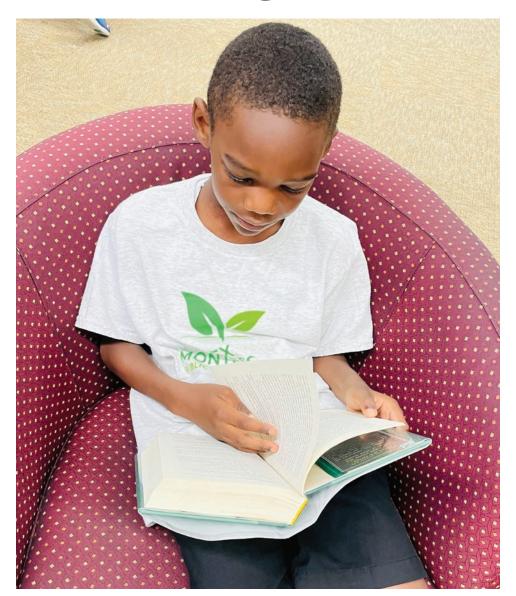
Development

Effective teachers of reading have a clear understanding of the well-documented continuum of reading development both for the on-track and off-track reader, and understand that children can go off-track at various points on the continuum from age 3 to 12. These teachers continually observe children to "mind the gap" between what the child can do and what the child should do next. They know when a child is off-track and proactively target specific instructional strategies and intervention to bring the child back on-track.

Assessment

Effective reading teachers of are not afraid of the word assessment. They enter the classroom every day wondering what they might need to learn about each child's use of reading strategies seeking opportunities for one-on-one interactions to confirm what they have observed.

Today's effective teachers of reading rely on a variety of assessment tools, including informal tests, interviews, observations, work samples, portfolios, and students' judgements of their own performance. Such assessment



Reading to learn

procedures when combined with teacher reflection provide teachers with a much more complete picture about their students reading and help them to make informed instructional decisions" (Blair, Rupley and Nichols, 2007).

These teachers don't just administer assessments because they are required to; they use classroom-based assessments to reflect on what a child is using and confusing leading to informed instructional decisions.

Pedagogy of reading

Skilled teachers of reading read research! They, or better yet their schools, subscribe to journals like such as Reading Teacher, The Reading Research Quarterly, or Reading League Journal. Just as Montessori teachers learn about various child development philosophies, exceptional reading teachers understand how arguments about reading instruction have developed over time. They appreciate that the "Simple View of Reading", first presented by Gough and

Tunmer in 1986 and further developed by Scarborough's Reading Rope, expands our understanding of how children learn to read words. This view of reading emphasizes the role that strong decoding skills and knowledge of language (vocabulary, structure, background knowledge, literacy knowledge, and verbal reasoning) plays in learning to read.

This view can be interpreted to mean that we don't need to emphasize strategies to support children's comprehension. However, effective teachers of reading know that that there is a well-documented body of research demonstrating that strategy instruction in the context of reading increases children's vocabulary and their comprehension of more sophisticated text.

Schools where children learn to think critically and develop the higher order thinking skills of proficient readers have a "coherent curriculum across grades that gives priority to higher order thinking, whether text comprehension, argumentation, or reasoning and proof" (Au & Raphael, 2021).

Note, Au and Raphael are not saying that these schools have a "core program"—they have a "core curriculum". You may be thinking we have that—the Montessori curriculum teachers learn in training! In fact, as one explores the teaching of reading one realizes that the Montessori curriculum is rich and coherent across some of the five essential strands identified by the National Reading Panel (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) and is quite frankly inconsistent in others; particularly supporting the child's development of reading comprehension. When I ask Montessori teachers which of the five strands the Montessori curriculum addresses, they almost always say phonics and vocabulary. Likewise, they identify phonemic awareness and comprehension as issues of concern, while fluency falls somewhere in between.

Montessori needs a model that encompasses a broader view of reading than the simple view if we are to reach the fullest potential for teaching reading in our classrooms. Duke and Cartwright (2021) present an interesting alternative to the Simple View of Reading called the Active View of Reading which has possibilities for Montessori Schools as a framework for a coherent curriculum of reading.

Embedded literacy

We know that reading instruction is best situated in the context of a rich socio-cultural classroom environment. Reading is embedded and celebrated across all aspects of the classroom within a context that makes reading meaningful and important. Because they have a strong pedagogical understanding of reading, effective teachers of reading can teach reading throughout the day. Children group and regroup for guided reading, literature circles, book clubs, and study groups. They research areas of interest, learn to question, seek answers, and to synthesize their learning to make a point or support an argument to others.

Montessori teachers know how to create this environment where children can flourish. What they need is a deeper understanding of what good readers do, what strategies work best to help all children be good readers and a school culture that is open to working both within and across program levels to create continuity and consistency.

Reading in Montessori

Teaching children to read in a child-centered Montessori classroom is

complex and challenging. I believe that we know what we need to do to ensure all Montessori children become proficient readers. I also know that the Montessori community can let the question of "is that Montessori?" and a persistent desire to prove that "Montessori has it all" get in the way of opening our hearts and minds to what is known about teaching reading.

I hope that Montessori school leaders who must chose a core program can use the framework provided in this article to help your teachers adapt that core program to work in the Montessori classroom rather than adapting the

classroom to the program. Some states allow us to put forth curriculum that addresses the science of reading as an alternative to a core program. Hopefully, this discussion will start you on the path to implement what we know about the teaching of reading into your Montessori classrooms providing you with the arguments you need to present your program to the policy leaders in your state. Montessori teachers have a unique opportunity to put into practice what we know are the best practices in teaching reading while maintaining

the child-centered and socio-cultural nature of our classrooms serving as a model for what should and can happen for all children.

Linda S. Zankowsky, Ed.D., is the Executive Director of the University of Delaware Montessori Teacher Residency, the developer and lead instructor for the American Montessori Society online Reading Certificate program, and chair of the board for Montessori Works and Sussex Montessori Charter School in Delaware.

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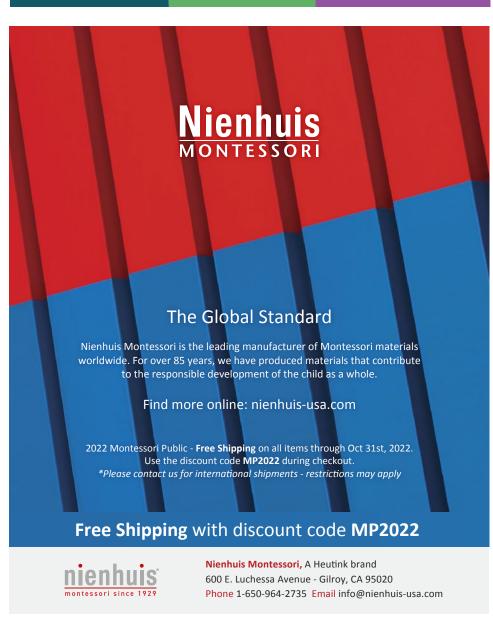
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Preparing the environment for reading

What criteria should we use to select decodable readers?

BY SARA COTNER

As Montessorians, we know how important the prepared environment is. We carefully prepare our environments to support independence and exploration. We put the materials on our shelves in a very specific order and find just the right containers to entice children toward productive work.

Therefore, when we think about how to help children grow into confident, joyful, lifelong readers, we must also think about how to prepare the environment. Selecting the right decodable readers is an immensely important part of that process.

What are decodable readers?

Books for emergent readers typically fall into one of two categories: Decodable Books or Pattern Books.

Here is an excerpt from a Decodable book:

• Memorize the sight word "the"

This book supports emergent readers with the decoding process by including several easily decodable CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words such as "bad," "rat," "hid," "tin," "can," "bit," and "pig."

On the other hand, here is an example of a Pattern book:

In Pattern books, children are not set up to focus on decoding skills. Instead, they are set up to try and memorize words and to figure out new words by asking themselves "What would make sense?" and by looking at the picture.

Putting pattern books in front of emergent readers reinforces negative reading skills, such as looking at the pic-



I put the fork here.

Excerpt from I Set the Table by Reading A-Z

I put the plate here.

Like the Decodable book, this Pattern book is geared toward an emergent reader. However, the approach is entirely different.

In Pattern books, there is a recurring sentence stem that the child memorizes and applies to every page. In this example, the sentence stem is "I put the XXX here." Even though "put" is a CVC word, it is not easily decoded by emer-

ture to make a guess. When children are learning to read, we want them to attend to the specific letters and sound them out as their default approach.

The Science of Reading is clear: the majority of children need to learn phonics in a sequenced and scaffolded way. This means they should work on decoding CVC words before they are introduced to words that follow the silent E rule or include r-controlled vowels. This means the books they practice reading should also follow a progression of including increasingly difficult phonics skills.

Decodable books in Montessori classrooms

Fortunately, most Montessorians already gravitate toward Decodable readers over Pattern readers. The way we teach reading in our primary classrooms aligns with the science of reading. We follow a progression of increasingly difficult phonetic skills, including letter sounds, CVC words, blends, and then phonograms.

At our lab school in Austin, Texas (called Magnolia Montessori For All serving ~475 children, infants through Upper Elementary), we use five criteria to evaluate the decodable readers we bring into our communities.

Phonetically controlled: We ask ourselves: Do the decodable readers isolate the difficulty for children? Do they include phonograms and puzzle words that children are familiar with? So many books seem to get too hard, too fast. They either include advanced phonics

skills that children haven't learned yet, or they include so many sight words that children haven't yet memorized. Or, conversely, they don't introduce the Montessori phonograms early enough!

Rich in meaning and interesting: As soon as you phonetically control text to scaffold reading for emergent readers, you can start to lose meaning. It's important for beginning decodable books to make sense in order to support the development of reading comprehension right from the start. Many early readers use esoteric words such as "jig." Books need to make sense so that children can actively build their ability to make sense of what they are reading as they read.

Realistic: As Montessorians, we know that children with "absorbent minds" are trying to take in and understand the world around them, so we want to present them with realistic storylines and images.

Beautiful: The youngest children are absorbing the world around them while they construct their own personalities. The quality of the materials we put in their hands matters.

Culturally Sustaining: Books serve as "mirrors, windows, and sliding doors" for children, as Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop said. Books help them see themselves reflected in the world. Books help them see people who are different from themselves. And they help children see what's possible for them out in the world. When children see themselves in books, they affirm their identities and see that their stories and families matter.

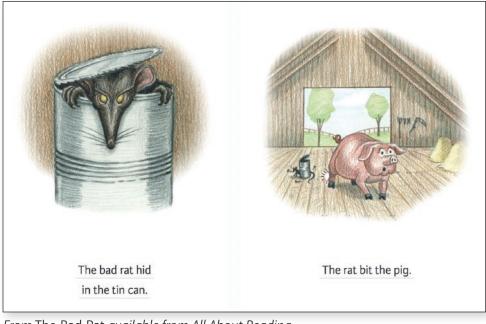
Along these lines, we seek out books that support the work we do in our classrooms to help children internalize important concepts, such as respect and conflict resolution.

It is so challenging to find decodable readers that check all these boxes! On the next page is an excerpt from *Mac and Tab*, a series that is commonly used by Montessorians.

At Magnolia Montessori for All, we looked at a range of commercially available readers. We found decodable readers that do a great job of being phonetically controlled but they aren't rich in meaning, realistic, beautiful or culturally sustaining.

We found other decodable readers that are rich in meaning, beautiful, and culturally sustaining but not phonetically controlled enough or realistic.

The closest set of readers we found checked off four of five boxes. It was



From The Bad Rat available from All About Reading

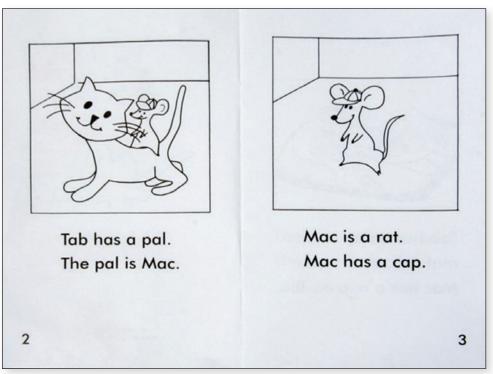
This story is intentionally written to support children's practice with decoding. It supports children to look at each letter, sound letters out, and blend them back together into whole words.

Children can read decodable books like *The Bad Rat* once they:

• Master their letter sounds

gent readers. Further, the word "here" includes the advanced phonetic concept of silent E.

Additionally, the word "fork" includes the advanced phonetic concept of an r-controlled vowel ("or"). Finally, the word "plate" includes the advanced phonetic concept of silent E.



Excerpt from Mac and Tab by Primary Phonics

everything except culturally sustaining.

In the end, we decided to use Miss Rhonda's Readers, FlyLeaf, The Peacekeepers Series, BOB Books, and All About Reading. Additionally, we decided to create our own set—Monarch Readers—to increase the number of options we have available for children.

Monarch Readers were developed by two of our teachers (Yolanda Romanelli and Stacie Scheller) and a local illustrator. We created our own sequence for introducing phonetic elements, added frequently used sight words, and chose story lines that emerged from our classrooms and our children's home livesanticipating a birthday walk at school, having a disagreement in the sandbox, planting a seed and watching it grow. Children at Magnolia gave us feedback on drafts of our work. One child said, "If you find eggs in a tree, that's going to be an exclamation mark, not a period!" Now that sentence reads, "I spotted five speckled eggs!" MontessoriPublic readers can learn more about the Monarch series at monarchreaders.com.

What criteria do you use to determine whether or not to bring certain decodable readers into your prepared environment?

Please feel free to reach out with your ideas so we can continue to collaborate with and learn from each other: hello@montessoriforall.org.

Sara Cotner is the Executive Director at Magnolia Montessori for All.

Criteria for selecting decodable readers:

Phonetically controlled: Do the decodable readers isolate the difficulty for children? Do they include phonograms and sight words that children are familiar with?

Rich in meaning & interesting: Do the books make sense and are they engaging?

Realistic: Do the books feature realistic characters and sto-rylines so that children in the Absorbent Mind plane of development deepen their understanding of the world around them while reading?

Beautiful: Are the books high-quality and worthy of our children's time and attention?

Culturally sustaining: Do the books serve as "mirrors, windows, and sliding doors" for children from a wide variety of racial, cultural, ethnic backgrounds and various identity groups?

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The science of reading isn't enough

For Utah's students, we need a shift in pedagogy



BY KACEE WEAVER

As the Instructional Coach for the district's Title 1, non-Montessori STEM magnet school, tasked with assessing emergent readers with the PAST (Phonological Awareness Screening Test), I sat across from a red-headed 8-year old and asked him to change the /p/ in the word "slop" to the soft /th/.

He struggled sounding out the word and then asked,

"What is sloth?"

I assessed 5th and 6th grade students, the majority of whom could not decode and had no background knowledge of the words "Asia" and "Europe" during the state-mandated reading test. In fact, it is not uncommon for Kindergarteners to move into 1st grade unable to blend CVC words fluently despite spending at least 120 minutes a day in structured ELA lessons and activities.

These and other experiences are in stark contrast to my experiences as a trained Montessori guide and former public Montessori teacher and administrator, where our students regularly met or exceeded Uniform Growth Goals in reading.

In a Montessori classroom, investigating and discussing topics (based on authentic interests) organically strengthens background knowledge, vocabulary, and verbal reasoning. Multiple representations of content (books, nomenclature cards, technology, and other teacher-made materials) support deep dives into learning with multiple entry points into the discovery and integration of new knowledge. Repetition, songs, concrete and pictorial materials bring language to life and provide a solid foundation for the responsibility and excitement of being a fluent reader and writer

In contrast, in many of the traditional district's classrooms, word recognition and language comprehension skills are taught in isolation and aren't routinely integrated into other content areas. Social Studies and Science subjects are regularly pushed aside for more ELA time and it's not uncommon

for children who don't complete their weekly minutes on the "individualized" computer (Science of Reading) programs to be kept in for recess or to miss art, PE, or library time. Children whose growth doesn't follow the pacing guide are provided interventions from yet another scripted curriculum, often implemented by a minimally trained paraprofessional.

Leadership tells us that in Kindergarten through 3rd grade the focus should be on *Learning to Read* so that in the 4th grade, children will be *Reading to Learn*.

Our early childhood schedules are broken into 15-30 minute chunks: writing, comprehension, phonemic awareness, phonics, science, etc. Activities are "siloed" into separate skills, each to be transferred to children at a prescribed time. We're told to "teach to the middle," yet keeping an entire class together leaves at least two-thirds of every classroom without appropriate individualized scaffolding. Children who are slower to demonstrate their learning are consistently left behind, while those that excel are asked to go slower and stay with the group.

My district has purchased six research based ELA curricula, costing millions of dollars each, and yet the number of 3rd graders reading at or above benchmark has increased by only 1% in the last 7 years. Unfortunately this is not an anomaly. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 54% of U.S. adults 16-74 years old—about 130 million people—lack proficiency in literacy, reading below the equivalent of a sixth-grade level.

In response to this crisis, Utah earmarked 20 million dollars to train all K-3 teachers in the Science of Reading (SOR). Instituting LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training is predicted to increase the state's 3rd grade reading proficiency from 50% in 2021 to 70% in 2023.

LETRS, a 168 hour professional learning course, accredited by the International Dyslexia Association "follows the structured literacy approach and provides educators with the Science of Reading pedagogy, depth of knowledge, and tools to teach language and literacy skills to every student" (LETRS, 2020). Completing this course was a complement and refresher of my Montessori lower elementary training and I learned new skills and strategies

to support the acquisition of language. But while this was absolutely necessary information for all educators, it isn't enough to reverse the nation's literacy crisis.

First, we're missing major opportunities for strong literacy foundations by waiting until a child is five to enter formal schooling. Montessori primary classrooms are filled with literacy rich experiences that build a strong foundation for reading and writing. Explicit, sequential, and systematic lessons are embedded in each material presented, practiced, and mastered by the child in a Montessori classroom.

Salt Lake School District, partnering with the Urban Institute for Teacher Education at the University of Utah, opened a Montessori early childhood program in their Rose Park Elementary and are experiencing tremendous student growth and teacher satisfaction. Students within the Montessori program attended 40 more days than their non-Montessori peers. In an area with high mobility, the Montessori program has retained the majority of their students for three consecutive years within their Early Childhood program. The Montessori students' scores on the Kindergarten Entrance and Exit Profile (KEEP) and Acadience far exceed those of their non-Montessori peers in the same school. Nicole O'Brien, principal of Rose Park elementary stated, "the three and four year olds are outperforming their 1st grade peers in writing and math!"

Additionally, Researchers in Hartford, Connecticut found that lower-income children in Montessori schools had much higher math and literacy scores than the lower-income kids in other schools. Research from the University of Virginia found that a Montessori preschool experience erases the income achievement gap between low income students and their higher income peers.

Montessori schools across the nation continue to prove that when provided with a prepared environment and developmentally appropriate materials children of all backgrounds and abilities can and will become skilled readers and writers. We need a consistent investment in education and parent resources for children from birth to five to truly transform our communities into engaged and literate citizens.

Secondly, traditional classroom practices must be dramatically transformed

in order for the Science of Learning to unfold. What our students need are educators trained in developmental appropriate progressions/practices and the flexibility of repeated opportunities for building independence of new skills through concrete materials, authentic discussion and application. They need the ability to learn with and from each other rather than simply alongside one another. They need a chance to feel successful in other areas if reading and writing aren't their strengths yet.

Educators are begging for more resources and support. Facebook's *Science of Reading — What I Should Have Learned in College* has 161k followers and *Teachers Pay Teachers* has 360,000+ resources listed for the Science of Reading. Essentially, educators are having to recreate the Montessori emergent and beginning reading materials for their own classrooms.

While many educators prioritize individual learning over curriculum pacing, the majority of teachers I have worked with in the last several years beg for more support implementing individual lessons and small groups. They struggle to identify the specific area of need, how to meet the need, and what to do with the rest of the class once they've identified a target. Shifting from a "whole group" teaching mindset to "everyone gets what they need" is a necessary transformation and one that must be a priority in traditional teacher programs and supported by district and school leadership.

Promising legislation, Utah's HB181, calls for a shift toward Personalized Competency Based Learning but we've yet to see any significant professional development or changes in school practices in order to alter the direction we're headed.

While the SOR initiative has realigned Utah educators towards a common goal and provided a foundation for developmentally appropriate practices, without a significant investment in parent education, quality primary programs, professional development and intentional district support for altering the traditional mindset, we're not going to see the incredible outcomes we continue to witness in Public Montessori programs.

Kacee Weaver, a Utah Hope Street Group Fellow and trained Montessorian teaches Kindergarten in the Ogden School District.

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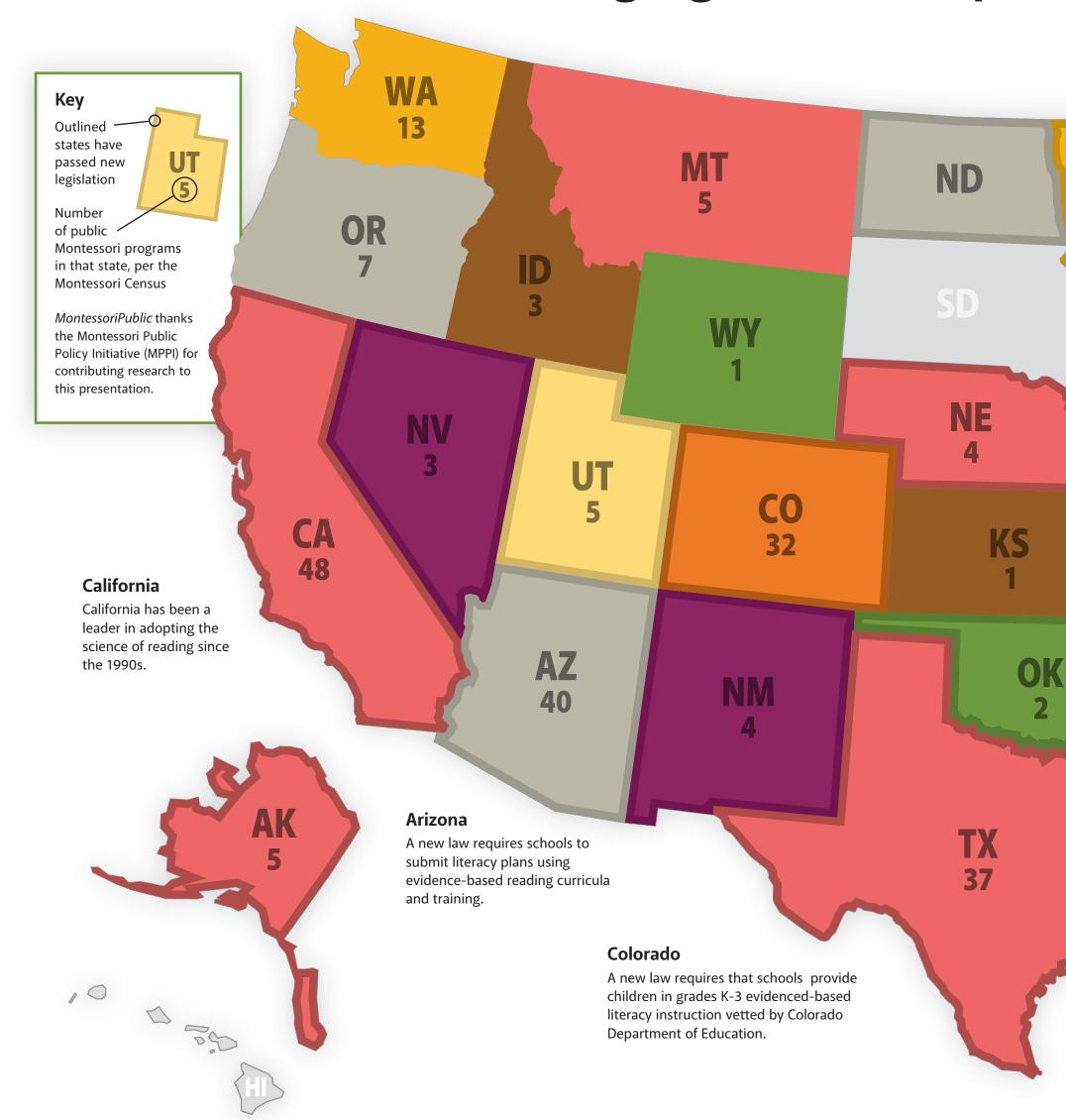
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Age of Montessori has changed its name to





New evidence-based reading legislation and publ



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IA

The state has appropriated \$3 million to provide teachers with training in evidence-based reading methods.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin's legislature passed a literacy assessment bill last year that was vetoed by the governor. Subsequent legislation is expected.

Michigan

A 2016 law requires that schools provide evidence-based core instruction, and a literacy coaching system with coaches who have knowledge of scientifically based reading research.

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North Carolina
A 2021 law requires

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A 2021 law requires all K-5 teachers to take professional learning in the science of reading, and educator preparation programs must train elementary teachers in the science of reading. Districts must demonstrate that their core curricula are aligned to evidence-based standards.

South Carolina

A 2014 law requires that teachers deliver evidence-based reading instruction and intervention.

100

Texas

A 2021 law requires all K-5 teachers to take professional learning in the science of reading, and educator preparation programs must train elementary teachers in the science of reading. Districts must demonstrate that their core curricula are aligned to evidence-based standards.

Florida

An updated law requires the Department of Education to identify evidence-based materials.

What is the science of reading?

continued from page 1

to reading develop in response to explicit instruction and deliberate practice. In short, approaches that emphasize direct instruction in phonemic awareness and phonetic decoding are known to optimize the ease and speed with which all children learn to read, and are particularly crucial for children at risk for reading challenges. Wholelanguage strategies, on the other hand, which encourage children to recognize words via their overall shape or through context clues, are not.

Via explicit instruction in letter-sound correspondence, a region in the learner's left temporal lobe, previously dedicated to facial recognition, is gradually repurposed for the task of reading. This area, referred to as the "visual word form area," will henceforth serve as a switchboard between visual networks at the rear of the brain (which process the image of written marks on paper) and two regions nearer the front of the brain dedicated to speech and meaning, respectively.

In a pre-literate brain, this visual word form area does not activate in response to the image of letters or words—there is no neural pathway connecting the visual stimulus of these strange marks on paper to the processes of speaking or retrieving meaning from words. Fascinatingly, though, brain imaging studies show this neural connection beginning to develop after just five hours of explicit decoding instruction! According to Stanislas Dehaene in his book *Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read*, with evidence-based instruction and deliberate practice, the typical learner will

time, the logographic approach is not a sustainable one, as the child cannot possibly memorize the holistic "picture" of every word in the English language. Neither can a teacher realistically introduce them all.

A new strategy is required for continued growth, and the learner transitions into the "phonological" phase. Here a child begins to grasp the alphabetic principle—that each grapheme (a letter or grouping of letters) maps directly onto a corresponding phoneme (a basic unit of speech sound) and furthermore, that mastery of this one-to-one code will enable independent decoding of unlimited new words.

Meaning is not accessed directly at this point; rather, written symbols are first processed by the visual region of the brain, passed from there to the visual word form area, then the speech area, and lastly to the region responsible for retrieval of meaning. During the phonological phase, there is a significant relationship between word length and reading speed, demonstrating that emerging readers decode grapheme by grapheme, a learning strategy inadequately supported by whole-language approaches.

As a phonological reader gains increasing fluency and accuracy, they reach the third and final "orthographic" phase of reading development. This phase is marked by the gradual development of dual, parallel neural routes connecting visual processing to meaning. While the existing phonological route is reinforced through practice, the visual word form "switchboard" begins to build a second pathway (the "lexical route") which bypasses spoken language and connects visual information

only achieved once one has attained fluent and accurate decoding skill. In other words, whole language reading is a result of instruction and practice, and not a strategy for it.

So we see that a child's literacy development is supported from birth by facilitation of phonemic awareness and later, usually in the pre-K and Kindergarten years, through explicit instruction in decoding. But Dan Willingham, in *The Reading Mind: A Cognitive Approach to Understanding How the Mind Reads*,

on skill level, it is, of course, dependent on a child's voluntary reading behaviors. Those reading behaviors are shaped by three primary factors: one's reading attitudes, motivation, and environmental characteristics impacting one's likelihood of acting on that motivation.

In keeping with these factors, The Reading Mind offers several helpful strategies for supporting the development of positive reading habits. First, because we know that attitudes are driven more by affect than by logic, providing positive,

Neural networks develop in response to explicit instruction and deliberate practice

urges educators and parents to remember that "teaching reading is not just a matter of teaching reading" (p. 127). At least two additional factors, namely background knowledge and reading behaviors, are highly influential for fluency and comprehension.

Willingham illustrates that comprehension is significantly impacted by the volume of background knowledge and relevant vocabulary that a reader brings to a piece (a point made famous by E.D. Hirsch and his Core Knowledge curriculum). In fact, studies have shown that a typically developing reader's prior content knowledge contributes far more to their comprehension and recall than do reading or verbal skills. This suggests that many tests, ostensibly serving as targeted measures of reading skill, are in actuality heavily influenced by content familiarity.

In addition to explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and decoding, then, children require a broad and carefully sequenced curriculum that is integrated across content areas. Curricular breadth equips learners with the array of background knowledge necessary to comprehend new texts, while mindful sequencing ensures that the volume of newly introduced vocabulary and content is challenging yet attainable.

In addition to cultivating a broad knowledge base, the development of positive reading behaviors is another essential element for successful reading. Motivation is a crucial factor, Willingham argues, because while leisure reading has a strong positive effect enjoyable early reading experiences will be more influential than will arguments for reading's importance or value.

Motivation, meanwhile, is related to one's perception of both a task's value, and the likelihood of its successful completion. Children may be motivated to read, therefore, by potential outcomes such as learning something new or sharing an interest with peers, but are more likely to act on that motivation when texts are carefully chosen for probable success, and in the context of a mindfully prepared environment. Such an environment, according to Willingham, eschews motivation-eroding external rewards, contains a plethora of books that are visible and within easy reach, and in which access to distracting alternatives (read: screen/video content) is limited.

Educators and parents, therefore, can support the development of positive reading behaviors by fostering positive associations with reading; selecting interesting, relevant, and appropriately leveled texts; making the choice to read both easy and preferable to available alternatives; and letting the reading be its own reward. Once positive habits are established, the relationship between reading behavior and skill level is reciprocal—children who read will experience more enjoyment and less tedium, increasing motivation and the likelihood of more voluntary reading.

Reading experts estimate that with proper, evidence-based reading instruction, the vast majority of children could be brought to grade-level fluency, freeing teachers' time and effort for further

Remember that "teaching reading is not just a matter of teaching reading"

progress through three phases of reading acquisition as their brain works to develop the pathways described above.

In the first, "logographic," phase, children memorize a handful of key words (often their own name and perhaps some frequently encountered brand logos) by sight alone, as if they were pictures. This is a key development, marking the child's dawning realization of the connection between marks on paper and spoken language. At the same

directly to the vast catalog of definitions and lexical relationships stored in the brain's "meaning" region.

The brains of expert readers operate according to this "dual pathways" model, in which phonological and lexical routes activate in a simultaneous and mutually supportive fashion. At this point, reading speed decouples from word length, and reading strategies more closely resemble those proposed by whole-language advocates. Importantly, this is

support of struggling readers. Readers familiar with Montessori education will have noticed the clear alignment between reading science and Montessori practice, as detailed by Susan Zoll in this issue (page 1).

Focusing just on the Primary (ages three to six) classroom, we see that Montessori begins with phonemes, exploring sounds, and then connecting them—as early as 30 months of age—to sounds. Thus it taps right into the phonological phase, possibly even before children recognize any words logographically.

We know that active, embodied cognition supports learning best. Montessori has a plethora of other materials supporting children in the phonological phase, from sandpaper letters to the moveable alphabet to phonogram cards and baskets of phonetic objects with labels; ample books of poetry and inviting topics are available in a cozy reading corner.

The materials themselves also motivate children, making reading fun—they learn about parts of speech with a small farm of animals, and by carrying out commands with command cards—and diagramming sentences is much more interesting with the grammar boxes of symbols. As children are moving into the orthographic phase, their motivation

to read increasingly complex texts is supported by the fact that they are reading to learn about things they personally want to learn, and learning for making reports and charts with peers that they will share back with the class.

But does this all work in practice? Studies suggest that yes, the Montessori approach to reading correlates with, even produces, better reading outcomes. Thus, as educators and policymakers are beginning to fully acknowledge the importance of science-based reading instruction, the Montessori approach makes excellent sense.

Dr. Corey Borgman is the Director of Education & Outreach at UVa's Montessori Science Program.



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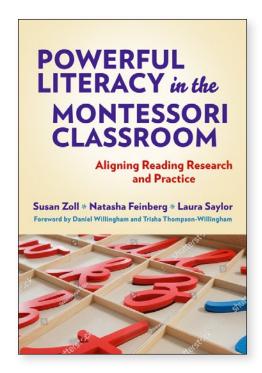




Montessori practices that align with the science of reading

continued from page 1

now found in multiple settings including the media, policy, and curricula – and its interpretation varies. Essentially, the Science of Reading has conclusively shown that there is a well-understood path towards learning to read fluently, grounded in phonemic awareness and decoding, but recognizing the crucial



importance of comprehension gained through knowledge about the world and about language.

To illustrate the skills needed to be a proficient reader, Yale University researcher Hollis Scarborough (2001) developed the Reading Rope based on her meta-analysis of reading research. The image consists of two braided cords labeled Language Comprehension and Word Recognition. These cords then consist of multiple literacy components referred to as "strands." Reading instruction must strengthen all strands of the Reading Rope to foster skilled reading.

We'll look at each of these strands and provide a brief synopsis using the lens of reading research and the Montessori Language curriculum.

Word recognition

Phonological awareness: Phonological awareness, "the appreciation of speech sounds without regard for their meaning" (NRC, 1998, p. 248), is foundational for building students' word recognition skills. Research points to sound as a scaffold or "bootstrap" for cognitive development.

With this in mind, pre-reading

students greatly benefit from activities that develop their phonological sensitivity. By helping students to recognize and differentiate the sounds they hear we are scaffolding their later ability to read. Phonological awareness is so important that when students enter kindergarten without these skills, they often struggle with reading difficulties.

The Montessori Primary (ages three to six) activity known as The Sound Game or I Spy requires no special materials, yet can be implemented every day as part of a morning circle or small group to attune children's listening skills to the sounds of words. A simple phrase readies children to listen for sound clues, "I spy with my little eye something in the room that begins with the sound /m/." The children then look around the room and excitedly call out objects they observe that begin with the letter sound (mat, marker, mop, map).

Decoding: Decoding is the association of a particular letter ("grapheme") or group of letters with an individual speech sound ("phoneme")—in Montessori classrooms, using Sandpaper Letters to teach "this letter makes the sound mmmm." Recognizing one-to-one letter-sound correspondence is a pivotal moment in a child's early reading development. And it is not long before children begin to slide, or "blend", these individual letters together to read three- and four-letter phonetic words.

The Montessori Moveable Alphabet (a collection of wooden or plastic letter shapes, familiar to children from the Sandpaper Letters) allows children to focus on encoding or "making words" by listening to the individual sounds in a word and then selecting the correct letter symbols to create words on a mat or table. This activity also supports early writing through invented spelling opportunities. "Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of phoneme identity, phoneme segmentation, and sound-spelling relationships." (NRC, 1998).

Sight word recognition: As beginning readers build decoding skills, they also develop the ability to connect and store letters and sounds with a word's spelling, its pronunciation, and its meaning through a process called "orthographic mapping." You can think of orthographic mapping as a permanent word storage that allows for the instantaneous recognition of words and word parts (such as "ing"). This expands the

definition of "Sight Words" or "Puzzle Words" to any word that a reader instantly recognizes and identifies without conscious effort. A fluent reader recognizes most words in less than 1/20 of a second, including between 30,000 and 60,000 high frequency and less frequent words (Sedita, 2020).

Montessori also introduces multi-letter digraphs (what Montessori educators often refer to as "phonograms"). Digraphs combine two letters to create one new sound. Consonant digraphs, such as /sh/ and /th/ and vowel digraphs such as /ai/ and /ie/ are introduced using Phonogram Letters, Phonogram Cards, etc. As reading progresses, students use three-part nomenclature, definition and activity cards. These reading activities, while a part of the decoding strand, also lead to numerous exposures which then map words and word parts orthographically, so they can be instantaneously retrieved in future encounters

Language comprehension

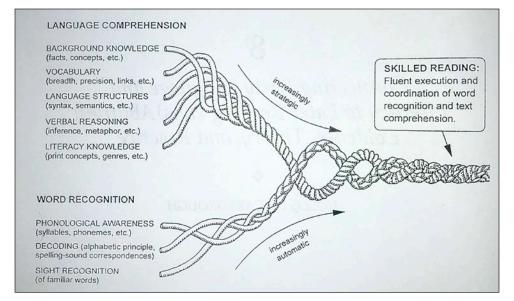
Background knowledge: Knowledge of our world and facts and concepts related to the sciences, history, geography, the arts, and the humanities are essential to language comprehension. Readers bring background knowledge—their knowledge of the world—to the task of reading. As children have new experiences and learn new concepts or words, the information is initially stored as working memory, a component of ex-

experiences with classroom instruction, media, or more direct types of lived experiences. Scarborough noted that even if a student is able to decode the words on a page, comprehension will be poor if a child lacks the background knowledge needed to understand the text.

Montessori classrooms are, of course, rich in background knowledge. Primary classrooms introduce knowledge and categories that can be directly experienced, including concepts and vocabulary for animals, plants, shapes, colors, geography, the arts, and much more.

The Elementary classroom extends this framework to anything that can be brought within the scope of the child's imagination, including human cultures, the natural world, and the structure of the universe. These studies provide students with abundant background knowledge supporting reading comprehension.

For example, the Fundamental Needs of Humans chart helps students visualize the basic needs shared by all humans: what varies is not the needs themselves, but the ways humans in various cultures meet them. This framework inspires young learners to study any culture in current contexts as well as at any time in history, providing them with relevant background knowledge that supports reading comprehension. The material also helps students develop an understanding that all people share fundamental needs, so that from a young age, they are developing a thoughtful,



Hollis Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) used with permission from Guilford Press

ecutive function that supports learning. This temporary storage system then transfers the new knowledge to a child's long-term memory, cataloging their

knowledgeable, and healthy respect for all people.

Vocabulary: As with background knowledge, a student's vocabulary—the

breadth and depth of words they know—can support becoming a proficient reader. And over time, proficiency as a reader further enhances vocabulary development.

Students immersed in language rich environments (homes and schools filled with conversations, book reading, and novel experiences such as visiting the local zoo, park, or children's museum) grow in background knowledge and vocabulary (Walberg & Tsai, 1983). Unfortunately, the opposite also holds true: children with fewer language and literacy experiences have a reduced cumulative vocabulary that can influence later reading success.

In a Montessori classroom, vocabulary learning blends literacy and content in strategic integrated instruction: a classroom practice "in which literacy activities (reading and/or writing) serve as a tool to cultivate content knowledge (science and/or social studies) while, at the same time, content teaching serves as a lever to facilitate literacy skills (vocabulary and/or comprehension." (Hwang, Cabell & Joyner 2021)

For example, Classified Cards—collections of cards showing images in a category—help build vocabulary. These collections help children classify their world while simultaneously learning correct terminology. Categories can be drawn from objects found in one's own culture and setting—objects found in a kitchen (refrigerator, plate, sink), a living room (sofa, lamp, rug), or a classroom (clock, pencil, easel)—or curriculum areas such as zoology, botany, geography, and music, all serving to enrich students' vocabulary.

Language structures: Language structures include grammar, "a description of the rules for forming sentences, including an account of the meanings that these forms convey" (Thornbury 1999). Explicit teaching of grammar and language structures, while less common in modern conventional classrooms, thrives in Montessori environments, where children are introduced to grammar early, at a time when they are fascinated by the rules and patterns of language.

By the kindergarten year students have already been introduced to the basic parts of speech and the "jobs" they hold in our language. Concrete grammar materials symbolize those parts of speech, helping students better grasp the abstract underpinnings of their language. Grammar, word study, and sentence analysis continue in the elementary Montessori curriculum.

Verbal reasoning: Verbal reasoning

—"the ability to infer or draw a conclusion from known or assumed facts" (Marcott et al., 2017)—allows students to comprehend information not explicitly stated in a text. This includes the ability to identify the details or "clues" given by the author that support a specific interpretation. Verbal reasoning is supported by other strands of Scarborough's rope such as background knowledge and vocabulary. It requires a synthesis of thought to produce a conclusion.

Montessori's emphasis on background knowledge and vocabulary development supports a student's ability to cognitively grasp the information provided by the author and "read between the lines" to fill in implied meanings. The Who Am I? cards offer practice with verbal reasoning skills. Children read a description card and match it to a picture and label, and then check their answers on a separate control card.

Literacy knowledge: Literacy knowledge is understanding that print carries meaning and that meaning is expressed through specific conventions, such as recognizing that print in English moves from left to right and top to bottom, that sentences are composed of individual words, and that written text follows specific rules such as the use of capitals and punctuation. As students mature, this understanding grows to include the accepted text structures. Non-fiction or informational texts may have headings, graphs, and various other text features that organize and clarify content, while works of fiction will generally follow a story arc.

The Montessori classroom offers authentic reading and writing experiences that build print concepts. Conversations around books being read and experiences being written provide opportunities for teachers to point out how an author (published or a child in the classroom) has organized text and adhered to certain conventions to be better

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understood. Even the youngest of students are a part of this learning as they create text with the moveable alphabet.

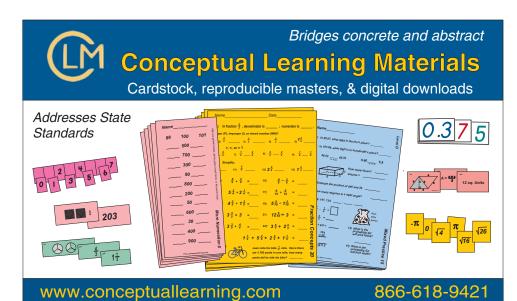
Overall, Montessorians concerned about the ascendancy of the "science of reading" will be wise to take a deep breath and look closely at Dr. Montessori's writings and lessons.

If we consider her scientific basis, her purpose of education, the context of her curriculum being developed in a highly phonetic language, and her framework for presenting lessons which include components of explicit instruction, we will see that again, Dr. Montessori has demonstrated that she was ahead of her time. For more information, please visit montessorisor.com

Susan Zoll, PhD is an Associate Professor at Rhode Island College and Co-Chair of the AMS Research Committee.

Laura Saylor, PhD is Dean of the School of Education at Mount St. Joseph University and is a member of the AMS Research Committee.

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Changing the Montessori narrative



BY **DAVID AYER**WITH **JARED JOINER**

Jared Joiner joined the NCMPS Board of Directors in 2021. *MontessoriPublic* sat down to talk about his background and Montessori story, and his take on Montessori's place in education reform.

MontessoriPublic: Can you tell us a little about your background—where you grew up, what school was like for you as a child?

Jared Joiner: I grew up in the DC area, and you could say I was around education since before I was born—my mother was a career educator, K through 6th grade teacher, and administrator even after she "retired". I actually attended Spring Montessori Bilingual Montessori Academy (still in business!) for preschool, but I only have vague memories. But my mom was a constructivist educator by philosophy, and her classrooms always included manipulatives and exploration, so it must have matched what she believed in.

MP: I have to ask, because I've heard from other Black educators, and we've seen it in some of the research—sometimes there's a feeling in Black communities that Montessori "isn't for us". Was that a factor for your family, as a Black child in Montessori?

JJ: I recall a diverse group of families at Spring—certainly we weren't the only Black family there, and some of my friends went on to high school with me. I think it's less, "this isn't for me" and more "do I see myself in it?" The Montessori narrative is still kind of "private schools for wealthy families." But as more of those other stories get told, it can be seen more as "for all families". If we're creating more public and affordable Montessori experiences, Black and brown, or generally economically disadvantaged families will have more access. If you see yourself represented there, you're more likely to think it's for you.

MP: So what did high school look like for you?

JJ: After that, for kindergarten through eighth grade, I attended Georgetown Day School (Ed.: founded 75 years ago as the first integrated school in DC), which has a similar progressive approach along with a social justice focus. I can say that my early experiences informed what I believe today: that this kind of education should be accessible to every child. I went on to Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, a public high school in Maryland. It became an International Baccalaureate Programme school after I enrolled and that curriculum allowed me to study diversely across disciplines—literature, history, sciences, arts—and synthesize those learnings in the capstone Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge courses.

MP: And after that?

JJ: College in St. Louis (Washington University) in Philosophy and Neuroscience, and some tutoring as a "side hustle", then and later while I worked in a lab. Working one-on-one with students made me think, maybe I should go into teaching! I joined Next Step Public Charter School in DC. (Ed: Next Step is the oldest charter school in DC and has made its name offering bilingual adult basic education, GED, and ESL programs to youth between the ages 16-30. It serves 500 students per year who are some of the most at-risk youth in the city.)

That experience teaching kicked off my education career. I was working with students who hadn't been served, or been successful in DC public schools—recent immigrants, formerly incarcerated, living on their own—to get GEDs and complete their education, and it made me want to learn more. I joined the board of the school, and saw a lot behind the scenes.

I returned to grad school for an M.Ed. in Mind, Brain, and Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education (where I met Sara Suchman, Executive Director at NCMPS), and went on to work in Boston public schools, San Francisco public schools, and ed tech.

MP: And now?

JJ: Now I serve as Director of Educational Practice at Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

(CZI), where I'm kind of getting back to my roots, supporting the creation of the learning experiences that help educators integrate support for student wellbeing and academic achievement, building relationship-focused education that meets the needs of all students and values them as whole people.

At CZI, that means supporting practices and innovations that are aligned to a broader definition of student success and a universal goal of making sure every student has access to positive, supportive relationships with educators. Our work includes a focus on Black, brown, and indigenous students to make that universal goal possible. *Ed: Learn more about CZI's work at* chanzuckerberg.com.

MP: And you joined our board, out of many organizations you could support with your time and energy—what was the appeal?

JJ: I had a personal connection through Sara and my education experience, and it really felt aligned with what I personally believe about schooling. I have a vision of what school could look and feel like, and NCMPS helps bring that to more children.

MP: In your undergraduate and graduate work on philosophy, neuroscience, the mind, the brain, and education, did Montessori come up? Are people in that world even that aware of Montessori?

JJ: I... think so? The folks in the Mind, Brain, and Education program—it may be Human Developmental now—talked about Montessori, Reggio, and Waldorf in similar ways, focusing on the variability, or "jaggedness" of students' development. Not all development happens at the same rate. And the fact that there are social and relationship elements of learning. Montessori comes up, less as a "research-based" model than as, "here's how a school experience that actually aligns with the research could look".

MP: So a sense that "those Montessori folks might know something about this" but not necessarily "here's a solution".

JJ: Mmm-hmm.

MP: So in the ed reform movement—we in Montessori have this strong feeling that education should be more about

than standards, if it's about standards at all—education should be about the whole person. Which is lofty, but doesn't really solve the problem that, say, superintendents have, which is test scores and "gaps" and graduation rates. How does that dichotomy play out in your neighborhood of the ed reform world?

JJ: Well, first, that's the million-dollar question, right? But I think unfortunately there's this false dichotomy about how learning happens. You either have to do academic standards, or whole child, and there aren't enough conversations bridging those two worlds. Whereas in reality what the science and the research tells us is that it's both. In order to have "academic success" you have to think about who students are, what their identities are, their mental health, their cognitive development, executive function, things like that. All of that comes together and contributes to meeting those standards.

And the pandemic hasn't done us any favors—it hasn't removed things from superintendents' plates. So they feel the pressure of a laser-focus on academics. And it's also politically fraught. If we use a lot of jargon it can be hard for parents to know what's really happening in classrooms, even if they might be OK with specific teaching practices. Schools might fall back on academics to steer clear of those political challenges.

MP: So is that potentially a play for public Montessori—we do both?

JJ: What Montessori has—because of a century of doing this work—is concrete practices that support whole child development and academics. People want to see the integration of the two and be able to point to for concrete practices that do both, and Montessori has codified practices in terms of teacher training, pedagogy, materials, and assessment, for example, that a lot of the newer work that's around now doesn't really have.

MP: With Montessori, you can hire a teacher who comes with albums, lesson plans, curriculum, etc. "off the shelf". And it does everything you want—it solves the whole child/academic dilemma. And it's not just some new thing we cooked up in a think tank—people have been doing it all over the world for more than a hundred years.

JJ: One challenge I think about is this: why is there 30-50 years of learning sciences and cognitive developmental research that doesn't get implemented? There's this mindset that if we just have the research and the evidence and the randomized controlled trial (RCT), educators will just go to the What Works Clearinghouse (Ed.—the federal resource for "evidence-based" practices and interventions) and find it and do it.

MP: So we generate all these papers and studies, and yet we don't get a lot of traction.

JJ: Right. But nothing is that linear, especially in education. What are the specific activities that can help a provider get their work onto the radars of superintendents and chief academic officers? It's like there's "demand generation" that needs to be done. Because there's a lot of stuff out there that's getting readily taken up in schools and districts because those programs just have really good marketing. It's time for things that have strong evidence to build out the storytelling capacity that the other providers have.

But the other side is this issue of "usability". How do we help educators deploy practices without feeling like they have to be experts in it from day one? Educators have a developmental pathway too! How do we make things easy for them to pick up, and what supports do they need to help them do better and better over time? Educators are incredible people, and they want to do things the right way, and we don't give them the space or grace to be in that developmental space. So they might hear, "this is a UDL [universal design for learning] program," and they think, "I'm not trained and certified in UDL, so I can't do this." And maybe the same for Montessori.

The brand names can make people apprehensive and less willing to deploy these practices. How do we clear the space for them to do that?

MP: So what does a "friend of Montessori" tell us? Go lighter on the brand name? We're stuck on the package deal—you can't just do the Montessori math, or the language, because all the parts work together. The mixed-age classroom, the spiral curriculum, all of it. But schools say, "OK, that sounds like a lot".

JJ: Right, and that to me is the challenge of the randomized controlled trial (RCT). We got this effect under these precise conditions. If you want fidelity of implementation, you have to do it in

this exact way, which isn't the reality of schools. So the question is, how might we take a more developmental approach to implementation—for any practice! but Montessori definitely. Because of the sheer diversity and variety of classrooms across the US, it's going to look different in every community. What are the design principles, the parameters, we could recommend, rather than us being so precious about what it looks like. I'm not the Montessori scholar here. But when school models are hard for leaders to implement, if it's going to require a lot of change, what's the middle ground that would allow more schools to implement and have impact for students.

MP: This came up in my conversation with (Board member) Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell (A talk with Dr. Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell, *MontessoriPublic* Summer 2021)—we don't even necessarily need the good RCT, we need the good story.

JJ: Research and evidence have a purpose. They're necessary but not sufficient for uptake. It's actually the storytelling that's needed for things to spread like wildfire and I think we've lost sight of that. Everyone wants to be evidence-based, do the study. But nobody reads the study! But people do read EdWeek, or The New Yorker, or listen to a podcast, and share that.

And, there is evidence for what is measured. For no-excuses charter schools, for example, there is a lot of evidence about narrow outcomes because that's what has been studied, and it lines up with a vision some people have for what school should look like, especially for Black and brown kids. But what about all the other models and outcomes, where we haven't had the donor to fund the study, which might also show really powerful effects?

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{MP:}}$ So we need to change the narrative.

JJ: For a lot of people—even for me as a Board member—the initial frame for Montessori is tiny, private, nursery school experience. That's a narrative framing challenge that other Montessori organizations don't necessarily have. So it's our challenge to solve.

Jared Joiner serves on the NCMPS Board of Directors and is the Director of Educational Practice at Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.



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Wildflower and charter schools

The micro-school model is pollinating the charter space

BY **DAVID AYER**

MontessoriPublic has been following the Wildflower story since 2016, when the network of Montessori micro-schools comprised just ten programs, seven in Massachusetts and three in Puerto Rico. Today that has spread to 47 schools in 12 states plus the Commonwealth, and they have begun to branch out into the charter school world.

Wildflower schools are by design independent, shopfront, one-to-two-room schoolhouses mostly independent of a larger organization but at the same time part of a network that includes the national Wildflower Foundation as well as other local Wildflowers that may be in the community. "Each school is an independent entity but sees itself as a node in a network, with substantial freedom in school-level decision-making." (wildflowerschools.org/how-we-work)

So how does that mesh with the charter model? Does each school apply for and operate its own charter? That sounds even more challenging than each school operating as its own small business—and yet, Wildflower has succeeded with that model. Or does one charter cover multiple schools—in which case, how is that different from a charter school with multiple sites, or a charter school network? How does Wildflower charter schools retain their trademark autonomy?

This spring, the Washington, DC Public Charter School Board granted a 15-year approval to DC Wildflower Public Charter School, a planned network of up to six micro-schools serving 225 students throughout the district. The first school, Riverseed Montessori, opened this year in DC's Ward 7, east of the Anacostia river, and plans to grow through 5th grade. We put these questions and more to Wildflower's communications team and the Founding Executive Director of DC Wildflower PCS, Rachel Kimboko.

MontessoriPublic: I think I understand Wildflower schools, but how do Wildflower charters work?

Wildflower: Wildflower's charter schools operate under the same principles (wildflowerschools.org/our-beliefs/#our-principles) as all Wildflower schools. Wildflower public charter schools expand access to Montessori by offering free programming for PK3-5 students.

MP: Who applies for and holds the charter—is it per school, or is there some kind of overarching structure?

WF: Each Wildflower charter includes a cluster of autonomous, yet interconnected small schools that implement Wildflower's distributed leadership and decision-making structures to work together and operate the charter.

Just like any other charter, a local founding board of community members applies for a charter. Wildflower works with these community members to build the application in alignment with Wildflower Principles and shared purpose. The independent nonprofit board holds the charter and makes a purposeful decision to partner with Wildflower and become part of the network.

MP: So how do the schools in the charter self-organize and maintain their autonomy? How is this different from one large school with six campuses?

WF: The conversation about who owns decisions is active important within a charter community. We value Teacher Leader autonomy and keeping decisions as close to the felt impact as possible. So Teacher Leaders will often ask, "Is this a site-based decision?" The presumed answer to this question is always, "yes." However, in a charter environment, a lot of decisions really do impact multiple stakeholders and/or sites, and when that happens, the decision (or a portion of that decision) moves outside of the individual school site and becomes a "charter-wide" decision. Each charter uses a collaborative leadership structure to make decisions on cross-site issues ranging from shared services around budgeting to reporting to the authorizer and/or state.

MP: What happens when something's not working? Let's say one of the sites is struggling to be successful and meet its mission. The charter board is accountable to the state or the district. How are the sites accountable to the board?



The Riverseed team

WF: The beauty of the Wildflower model is that it's self-correcting. If a site was not performing well, peer sites would engage with that site before it showed up as an authorizer concern at contract renewal. This allows for a hyper-local focus on accountability to the charter. Accountability is distributed and exists at all levels of the organization. Within a school, Teacher Leaders are accountable to each other; across sites and with charter support staff, accountability exists to the terms of the charter and site performance, within the board - in alignment with the role of the board. While this has never occurred, a site could proactively close individually, or peer sites or the board could determine that a site must close if it isn't meeting the terms of the charter or the community's mission.

MP: It sounds like the Teacher Leaders in a Wildflower Charter have roles beyond their individual schools.

WF: Just as in our independent schools, Teacher Leadership is a combination of administrative leadership at the school site and leadership in the classroom as a

teacher. We believe Teacher Leadership expands beyond the classroom but still includes this most critical space. In a charter setting, leadership extends to the charter community, where Teacher Leaders come together to determine the path of the charter and share in the decision-making of the full community, alongside charter organization staff who are needed to execute on this vision and be responsible stewards of public funds.

WF: In a Wildflower charter, Teacher Leaders are co-constructors of the systems and tools that will support them as they administer their individual school. With each decision, we consider together whether or not the proposed solution is a sustainable one for individual schools' teams and the charter team. What we develop together is a robust set of roles and responsibilities that are necessary for a successful school and network. Just as we would hope for the children we'll teach, each Teacher Leader is bringing their own strengths and opportunities for growth so their leadership path will be different and grounded in the needs of the school.

MP: The DC Charter sounds bigger than what you might call a "microschool", with six campuses, some (such as Riverseed) planning to serve PK3 through 5th grade, and combined enrollment of 225. How do you square that with the microschool model?

WF: All the DC charter sites will remain small one or two room classrooms. Riverseed will never serve more than 60 students but will have a primary and elementary classroom. All sites together can serve up to 225 students embedded in communities across the city but that growth will happen slowly over the next four years and be driven by the Teacher Leaders in each distinct microschool.

MP: What else is happening with Wildflower and charters? I understand there's work happening in Colorado.

WF: The Wildflower Colorado team is pursuing applications for two charters, in Grand Junction in western Colorado and in Aurora, just east of Denver. Grand Junction is in rural Mesa County, an area that currently has few Montessori options. Aurora, one of the largest suburbs of Denver and one of the most diverse communities in the country, has

one existing public Montessori school. Both charters would include an interdependent network of Montessori micro-schools, each led by a partnership of two Teacher Leaders, supported by charter-wide staff, and co-designed by a local coalition of community partners and prospective families. The charters in both regions plan to open their first micro-school sites in August 2023 (three sites total, two in Aurora and one in the Grand Valley). We will learn if the applications are approved in November 2022.

MP: And beyond?

WF: We have a charter in Minnesota with three sites and capacity to grow up to 13 total, and in New York with two, with a third planned for 2023. DC has been approved for six sites, and the first, Riverseed, has just opened. The three sites in Colorado would bring the total to 15 if all open as planned. Currently six of our 47 schools are charters.

MP: Last question: I know that Wildflower seeks to serve as many low-income families as possible, consistent with sustainability. Obviously public charter schools meet that goal by being tuition-free. Does this expansion

into the charter model indicate a new direction for Wildflower? Will we see greater expansion in the future, and possibly even collaboration with districts? What does this mean for the future of Wildflower?

WF: In the charter sites, Teacher Leaders use the same enrollment system—usually lottery based—as local public schools. Their student enrollment and family engagement is hyperlocal and usually involves activating families who are already enrolled or live nearby.

Since the schools are public, families don't pay tuition and the teacher leaders establish and rely on community members and community partnerships to reach the families they want to serve. We expect more charters will get established, as this pathway lends itself well to our purpose, and we will continue to explore innovative district collaborations as long as there are teachers who want to open public microschools—which we believe is the case.

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



Wildflower Schools

Founded: 2014 Schools: 47

Locations: 12 States and
Puerto Rico (California,
Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky,
Massachusetts, Minnesota,
North Carolina, New Jersey,
New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania,
Rhode Island and Puerto Rico)

Ages served:

19% Pre-preschool (0-3) 62% Preschool (3-6) 17% Elementary school 2% Secondary school

Minnesota—3 sites

Charters

New York—2 sites + 1 planned for 2023 DC—1 site + 5 planned Colorado—2 sites planned



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Book Review: The Best Weapon for Peace



BY MIRA DEBS

This book review is reprinted with the author's permission from the Journal of Montessori Research, Spring 2022, Voume 8, Issue 1.

The Best Weapon for Peace: Maria Montessori, Education, and Children's Rights

by Erica Moretti

University of Wisconsin Press, 2021, 296 pp., 6 x 9 inches, 34 b/w illus., US\$79.95 (casebound), ISBN 9780299333102

In recent years, European scholars including Valeria Babini, Luisa Lama, Letterio Todaro, and Christine Quarfood have been leading an academic reassessment in book-length monographs of Maria Montessori's life and intellectual legacy. Valeria Babini and Luisa Lama's (2000) biography, Una donna nuova: Il femminismo scientifico di Maria Montessori [A New Woman: The Scientific Feminism of Maria Montessori], places Montessori in the context of Italian intellectual movements, especially feminism. Letterio Todaro's 2020 study, L'Alba di una nuova era [The Dawn of a New Era] examines Montessori's work in the context of the global Theosophical movement. Christine Quarfood's (2017) study of Montessori's life, Montessoris pedagogiska imperium: Kulturkritik och politik i mellankrigstidens Montessorirörelse [Montessori's Educational Empire: Cultural Criticism and Politics in the Interwar Period], forthcoming in an English translation, examines the intellectual history of Montessori's pedagogy and sheds new light on her decade-long collaboration with Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini.

Fortunatelyforscholars who don't read Italian or Swedish, Erica Moretti's intellectual biography of Maria Montessori, The Best Weapon for Peace: Maria Montessori, Education, and Children's Rights, helps bridge the gap. Moretti, a professor of Italian at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, writes in conversation with fellow European

researchers and builds on their work to present this English-language examination of Montessori's pacifism that places her as a central figure in 20th-century global humanitarianism, disaster relief, peace activism, and social reform.

In Moretti's retelling, we see Montessori deploying peace in action, engaging with Italian global leaders including Pope Benedict XV, Mahatma Gandhi, Rukmini Devi Arundale (Indian Theosophist and founder of Indian classical dance), and Benito Mussolini, and existing in contradictory states of pacifist visionary and pragmatic and adaptive compromiser. Along the way, Moretti develops a portrait of Montessori continuously working to support children and families in the most vulnerable conditions—Italian peasants, earthquake orphans in southern Italy, and traumatized children after World War I—as she lobbied the Pope to establish the White Cross and envisioned a ministry for children's rights in each country.

Moretti's book consists of six chapters that develop how Montessori understood pacifism and worked to implement it as a series of "concentric circles of influence" (p. 13): the first circle is the development of a child's state of internal peace, involving both the body's ability to move gracefully and the mental state of acting with empathy for those around them. The second circle is the impact of the child in the family, and the third and final circle is a state of social peace.

Building on the work of Italian historians Luisa Lama and Paola Trabalzini, $Chapter\,1\,places\,Montessori's intellectual$ development of the 1890s in the Italian context of public health (then called social medicine and moral hygiene), feminism, and nation-building. These efforts help counter the representation of Montessori as a singular genius; rather, she developed her ideas in wide-ranging conversation with many of her peers in Italy and elsewhere. Although her work with disabled children before creating the first Casa dei Bambini is well documented in other Montessori biographies, Moretti adds new context by sharing details of Montessori's work with rural Italians living outside Rome. While her work addressing urban poverty is well established, this information provides an important rural setting in which Montessori applied and developed her theories. In Chapter 1, Moretti also shows how the aesthetics of the

Montessori classroom—a tranquil environment that stimulates a feeling of peace—was part of broader urban-redevelopment efforts. Italian urban planners who were Montessori's contemporaries believed, as she did, that the poorest of society could be transformed through redesigning spaces for living and learning.

Chapter 2 brings us Montessori in the middle of the First World War as she considered how her educational method could provide peaceful rehabilitation to



support children experiencing the traumas of war. At a time when society was just beginning to develop language to talk about soldiers who were traumatized on the battlefield, Montessori understood that children who had experienced the horrors of war would need what we would now call trauma-informed education to support them. Several Montessori schools in Paris and the northern Italian region of Lombardy put the principles into practice, using materials created in workshops staffed by wounded veterans. The solution Montessori proposed, the White Cross, never got off the ground, despite her frequent appeals to the Pope for support. Even so, this idea represented Montessori's international framework for supporting children in conflict situations, a vision being implemented today by Montessori educators. Moretti also explains why Italian policy makers chose an alternative early childhood model developed by sisters Rosa and Carolina Agazzi, instead of the Montessori Method, as they sought to create a compliant and military-ready next generation.

In Chapter 3, Moretti explains the development of Montessori's theoretical foundation of pacifism and how it radically differed from the theories of her pacifist contemporaries. Fellow pacifist activists of the time were focused on public demonstrations, conferences, or teaching an explicit curriculum of peace to children. Montessori had a different vision. In a series of London lectures in 1917, she elaborated on the way in which peace was a state that needed to be cultivated from within, espousing that political peace could be created only by developing a new generation of children as agents of peace.

In Chapter 4 Moretti grapples with how Montessori, despite her focus on peace-making, could enter into a period of collaboration with the Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini from 1922 until 1934, accepting urgently needed financial support for her model from the fascist regime to support herself and her family.

Moretti explains the compromises made during this time. For example, Montessori downplayed her interest in pacificism, sending representatives to global pacifist conversations about the rights of children throughout the 1920s but not directly participating. As she moved away from global activism, she returned to Italian nation- building efforts through education and medicine, work that had characterized her early career as she sought to expand and institutionalize her curriculum around Italy.

In contrast to other scholars who argue that Montessori was apolitical or unaware of the extent of fascist violence, Moretti argues that Montessori was a "keen political observer" (p. 126) who saw an opportunity to capitalize on Mussolini's desire for greater international legitimacy for the Italian Fascist regime by tying himself to her method. With Mussolini's financial support, in 1924 Montessori changed the name of the Italian Montessori organization— Società Amici del Metodo (Society of Friends of the Method)—to its current name, Opera Nazionale Montessori. By 1926, Montessori served as the honorary president, with Mussolini appointed as the organization's actual president. The regime helped open schools and a training center in Rome and supported several Montessori journals. Fascist education took a deliberate turn away from Montessori, starting with the leadership

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GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

November 12 Montessori Educational Programs

International

QUALITY MONTESSORI - PRACTICE & ASSESSMENT KIAWAH ISLAND GOLF RESORT—SOUTH CAROLINA

2023

January 14 Celebrating Our Montessori Children

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LACROSSE, WISCONSIN

February 17-19 Montessori Educational Programs

International

KIAWAH ISLAND GOLF RESORT

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AMI REFRESHER COURSE AND WORKSHOPS

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of Achille Starace, who sought to increasingly fascistize the Italian school system. In the 1930s, Montessori rediscovered her voice in favor of pacifism (developed further in Chapter 5), while fascists began to speak of "Montessorianism without Montessori," (p. 140). As a result, the link between the regime and Montessori no longer became tenable. Montessori left Italy, ultimately settling in the Netherlands, where her organization, Association Montessori Internationale, eventually established headquarters.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines how

Montessori's conception of what Moretti calls the outermost circle of pacifism, the idea of cosmic education, developed through her almost decade-long sojourn in India from 1939 to 1946 and 1947 to 1949. Here, Moretti provides a thoughtful addition to the limited published scholarship about Montessori education in India (Debs, in press; Leucci 2018; Tschurenev, 2020). In particular, she discusses how Theosophist Rukmini Devi Arundale, a classical dancer who popularized the *bharatanatyam* dance tradition and supported the revitalization of

Indian art traditions, was a significant influence on Montessori's evolving conceptions of art and cosmic education.

Moretti's thematic study moves chronologically, but readers must possess a solid grounding in Montessori's biography to follow the many moving parts. I continuously marveled at Moretti's ability to connect such a large number of social, political, and educational ideas to Montessori's conception of peace-making in education, even if I sometimes I struggled to keep track of how all of the threads fit together.

Researchers and Montessori educators will find this work illuminating for the way it provides social context into Montessori's ideas and pedagogical methods. Importantly, it further expands the circles of Montessori's intellectual endeavor by connecting it to scholarship of 20th-century European history, Italian studies, and peace studies.

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