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The science of reading for bilingual children

What about children who need literacy in more than one language?



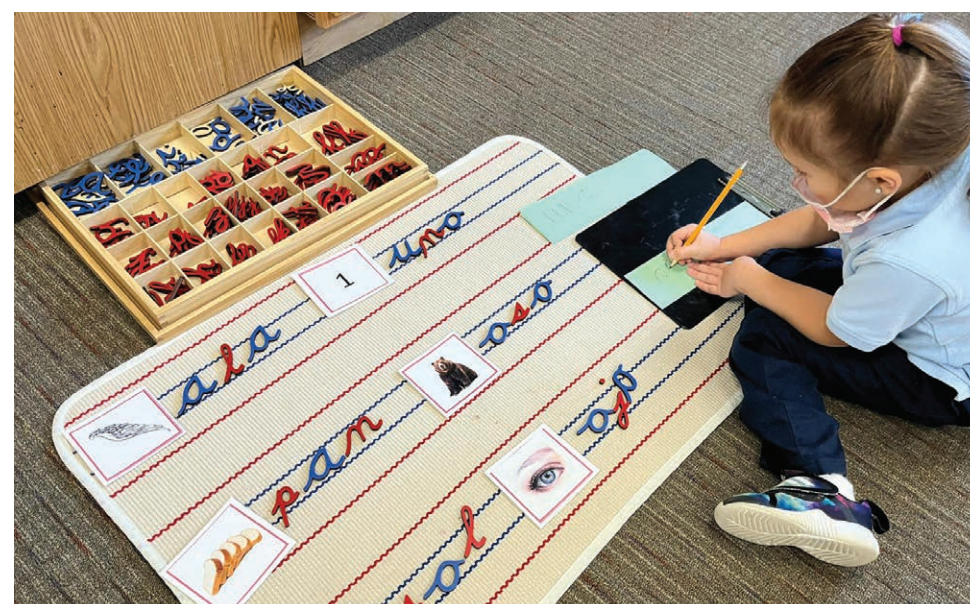
GABRIELA ITURRALDE ESPEJO

In the fall 2022 issue of *MontessoriPublic*, NCMPs Executive Director Sara Suchman introduced the topic of reading by highlighting the primacy of communication as an “essential human tendency.” She recognized that communication is culturally determined and experience dependent. She hoped that the publication would open the conversation and offer mirrors and windows to those of us working in Montessori schools.

It definitely did! I could see my school, myself, the guides, administrators, and even the children reflected in our efforts to navigate between being in compliance with the state requirements and being faithful to our Dual Language

Montessori program. I appreciate Linda Zankowsky offering a window through which to examine ideas to teach with the Science of Reading (SOR), while I also recognize, as Kacee Weaver says, that the SOR isn’t enough. In this article, I wish to continue the dialogue and to build on what Corey Borgman and Angeline Lillard shared about how children learn to read, with a focus on emergent bilingual children. We must center the linguistic and cultural needs of our bilingual children in all of our schools!

I am the Biliteracy Coach at Montessori del Mundo, a Dual Language charter school in Aurora, Colorado serving a very diverse community in terms of race, language, culture, and SES. Our Dual Language program instruction in Children’s House is 90% Spanish-10% English, moving to 50-50 in Elementary. Our planned Adolescent program will be among the first Dual Language public Montessori adolescent programs in the nation. We are proud and grateful to be a public charter school because it gives us the opportunity to offer a unique program that responds to the needs of our community which otherwise would not



Apreniendo a escribir y a leer

be able to afford it. We face the same challenges as other public Montessori schools in states where policies mandate the implementation of the SOR: adopting a state approved core curriculum, approved reading assessment, and teacher training on the SOR. And, we do it all in two languages while honoring our Montessori foundation.

Implementation of a core reading program

The state list of approved programs does not (yet!) include the Montessori curriculum and available bilingual options are limited, further reducing

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Creating demand for public Montessori

Montessori has a compelling story to tell



DAVID AYER
WITH MONIQUE O'GRADY

Monique O’Grady joined the board of the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector last year. In her career, O’Grady has been a journalist, a school board member, a public relations professional, and a Montessori parent and

advocate, so we thought she might have something to tell us about getting the public Montessori story out there. She sat down with *MontessoriPublic* for this conversation, edited for clarity and space.

MontessoriPublic: Tell me how you got involved in Montessori in the first place?

Monique O’Grady: It was my husband’s fault!

We were living in Arlington, looking for a preschool for my now-28-year-old, and my husband read an article in the Washington Post that mentioned that Arlington County had public Montessori. I didn’t know a thing about the model but I thought, “Well, this looks like a good program, let’s go ahead and apply.”

At first she didn’t get in but then eventually she got in as a four-year-old.

I remember talking to the teacher at the time and she said, “Oh, you’re really going to love this!”

I said, “Well, this is sweet but you know by the time my child hits kindergarten I’m going to put her in a real school.”

And a parent overheard and said, “Oh, you might change your mind!” And I thought, “OK, maybe,” but I’m thinking, “No, I won’t.”

But then at the end of the year my child, who was a young four—she only made the cut-off by about a week—she was reading after that one year and I just thought, “What is happening here?”

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Montessori gets a new Handbook

A massive new scholarly publication brings Montessori firmly into the academic world



DAVID AYER
WITH **ANGELA MURRAY**

In 1914, “Dr. Montessori’s Own Handbook was published in English to coincide with her visit to the United States,” as a brief introduction to her method for American readers. This year (2023) sees the publication of the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education*, a massive, comprehensive, globally sourced, academic introduction to and overview of Montessori education, the history and scope of the Montessori movement, as well as current issues in Montessori and directions for future research.

It’s a little daunting to convey how important this work is for the development and furtherance of Montessori education, especially in the publicly funded realm. For decades, partly due to the movement’s own actions, and with notable, heroic exceptions especially in more recent years, Montessori has stood apart from the academic and research

world, content to practice and grow its worldwide reach without much interaction with the world of studies, research programs, publications, and the like.

So how did something like this finally happen and what does it mean? Angela Murray, director of University of Kansas Achievement & Assessment Institute’s Center for Montessori Research (CMR), and co-editor of the Handbook (with Eva-Maria Tebano Ahlquist from Stockholm University, Maria McKenna from the University of Notre Dame, and Mira Debs from Yale University), shared some of the story with *MontessoriPublic*.

“So you can imagine, when we brought in a booth full of Montessori materials, we attracted a lot of attention”

It all goes back to the formation of a Montessori Special Interest Group, or SIG, as part of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). AERA is a gigantic (25,000 member) professional organization founded in 1916, representing education researchers in the United States and around the world. 150 SIGS within AERA “provide a forum within AERA for the involvement of individuals drawn together by a common interest in a field of study, teaching, or research when the existing divisional structure may not directly facilitate such

activity,” from Adolescence and Youth Development to Writing and Literacies. Up to 2019, however, Montessori had no official representation—a measure of how removed the model has been from the mainstream.

That all changed in 2019 with the formation of a Montessori SIG as a result of work by an informal Montessori research working group. At the 2019 AERA annual meeting, “the world’s largest gathering of education researchers and a showcase for groundbreaking, innovative studies in an array of areas,” the Montessori SIG was able to represent at a booth in the exhibit hall, crammed

with software companies, publishers, and universities, at an event attended by 15-20,000 people.

“So you can imagine, when we brought in a booth full of Montessori materials, we attracted a lot of attention,” Murray told me. “We would have people come by and say, ‘Oh, I went to Montessori’ or ‘My child, or my granddaughter, is in a Montessori school,’ or some even said, ‘You know, I was a Montessori teacher before I got into academia.’ But then

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COMING FALL 2023:
OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

It’s time to celebrate what’s going well! What’s great about your public program, and how did you get there? Reach out to editor@montessoripublic.org

Our next issue will be in October, 2023.

More guidelines on page 23.

In this issue: Literacy, continued

This issue, we’re continuing last issue’s Science of Reading with implementation reports from the field.

Amber Elder and **Carey Montgomery** walk us through the process of integrating Science of Reading requirements in a North Carolina school district.

Jennifer Dempsey explains the importance of spelling for fluent literacy.

Gabriela Iturralde Espejo writes about bilingual literacy.

Tara Valentine tells her story of going beyond Montessori only to rediscover the literacy practices at the core of the method.

Jasmine Williams shares her presentation on the varieties and impacts of various “Englishes” from the AMS Event.

Also in this issue:

David Ayer reviews an important new book, the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education*.

Katie Brown reports on exciting new research presented at the Research Poster Session at the AMS Event.

Monique O’Grady speaks with *MontessoriPublic* about how the public movement can extend its reach.

Laragene Williams describes a new professional training and role emerging in Inclusive Montessori.



Explicit spelling instruction drives literacy

Reading and spelling don't come easily for all children



JENNIFER DEMPSEY

I was the third-grade spelling bee champion in my small, rural New Jersey elementary school. My teacher awarded me with a pocket-size thesaurus for my accomplishment.

My classmates and I spent months memorizing lists of disconnected words with no analysis or reflection of spelling patterns, rules, etymology, or morphology. While rote memorization allowed me to take home the coveted thesaurus, for most students, this practice does not support the processes underlying literacy acquisition. Many children will need direct and explicit spelling instruction to spell (and write), even if their reading is at or above grade level. Learning to spell is more complicated than reading because spelling requires complete and accurate word memories.

When explicitly taught the rules and patterns of the English language, approximately 84 percent of all words can be spelled accurately by sound-symbol correspondence patterns alone. But English has a great many words, and this leaves at least 100,000 more that could be spelled correctly if other information was considered, such as word meaning and origin. It would take an additional twenty years after the spelling bee for me to learn about the fascinating rules and patterns of the English language.

I was a wide-eyed and eager student teacher nearing the completion of my master's degree in Elementary Education with a focus in Montessori Studies. The lower elementary classroom I was placed in had been led by a master guide trained in primary through upper elementary. She created a wonderfully rich environment where students collaborated in concentrated work and inquisitive research, fulfilling their intrinsic desire to learn. During my first week in the classroom, she called the second-year students to the lesson table to explore why some one-syllable words with the ending /ch/ sound were spelled with a "tch." I personally could not answer why, and I was intrigued by this approach

to word study and spelling. As a young child, I never learned the rules of spelling. Witnessing the enthusiasm and excitement firsthand as students gained a deeper understanding of our language motivated me to begin my comprehensive study and apprenticeship in Orton-Gillingham and structured literacy practices.

Orton-Gillingham (OG) is an approach used to teach literacy that was first developed to assist students with demonstrated reading, writing, and spelling difficulties. It originated in the 1920s by Samuel T. Orton, a neuropsychologist and pathologist who worked with patients with brain damage, and Anna Gillingham, an educator, and psychologist. Together they created a multisensory learning strategy that involved the integration of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning pathways for reading instruction. Early attention was focused on children with language processing difficulties, but the approach began to be utilized for all students learning to read, write, and spell.

Due to the limited amount of high-quality research on this topic, a review of meta-analyses shows mixed outcomes regarding the efficacy of the Orton-Gillingham approach as a whole. However, one analysis does show positive results for certain elements of the approach. In a 2006 literature review of twelve studies focusing on the effectiveness of the approach with students in elementary school through college, positive results were found for word



Breaking it down to the basic elements

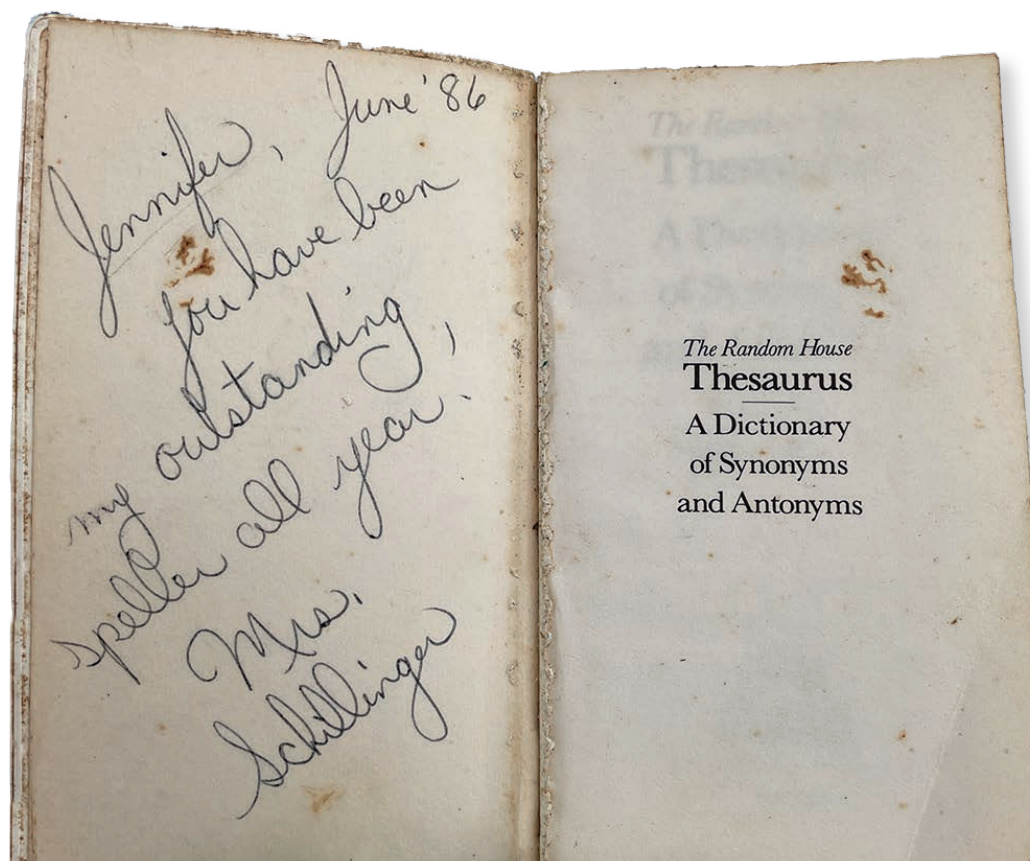
reading, word attack/decoding, spelling, and comprehension. Substantial research demonstrates the importance of explicit spelling instruction within a structured literacy framework, which is a critical component of OG.

Learning to spell words supports the construction of high-quality lexical representations (quick and automatic retrieval of word meaning), an essential driver of literacy acquisition. The English writing system is complex, with 26 letters producing 44 sounds. Explicit instruction in spelling and reading allows students to strengthen their application of patterns and rules of the English language. Studies with second and third-grade students found

moderate to large effects on students' reading when encoding skills provided spelling instruction that was sequenced from easier to more difficult (Blachman et al., 2004). Therefore, it becomes essential that educators enhance literacy skills with spelling lessons that include explicit instruction of carefully selected words. The goal is to make sense of words by selectively referencing the factors that explain why a word is written the way it is (Spear-Swerling, 2022).

Dr. Montessori's development of language lessons and materials was based on Italian orthography, which is shallow (i.e., mostly phonetic and extremely predictable). There is a direct, straightforward grapheme-to-phoneme correspondence. On the other hand, the English language employs a deep or opaque orthography—the relationship between graphemes and phonemes is much less direct. While English is comprised of 84 percent predictable rules and patterns, it contains many more complex codes that must be explicitly taught. For this reason, I have implemented structured literacy approaches in my Montessori lower elementary environment for many years.

The Orton-Gillingham approach and Montessori method, both scientifically based, share many commonalities. They both emphasize systematic, cumulative, explicit, and diagnostic instruction and multi-sensory techniques. Considering the research-supported benefits and the similarities between the Orton-Gillingham approach and the Montessori method, I have found great success and ease



of implementation by utilizing the OG approach in my lower elementary classroom. Structured literacy approaches like Orton-Gillingham should contain the following general principles:

Systematic and cumulative instruction: Lessons build upon prior knowledge. The order of lessons begins with the most basic concepts and becomes more complex. Lessons always spiral back and include a review of previously taught concepts. A planned scope and sequence is followed.

Explicit Instruction: “I Do, We Do, You Do” (Similar to the three-period

How does this approach unfurl in my lower elementary classroom?

I pull differentiated groups for a lesson on Monday. Each week the groups focus on a spelling rule or pattern as I work through the scope and sequence. The introductory lesson introduces the topic, the students talk about the rule or pattern through guided discovery, and they record it in their spelling books. First-year students have lots of practice finger tapping to stretch the sounds of the word as they write the words in their

Many children will need direct and explicit instruction to spell (and write), even if their reading is at or above grade level

lesson). The deliberate use of scaffolding begins with lots of teacher support and then weans the child to become more independent. Instruction is intentional and explicit and includes modeling and immediate corrective feedback—lots of student engagement.

Diagnostic: Lessons are individualized and differentiated. Guides are continuously diagnosing the needs of the students. Differentiation occurs within groups based on careful monitoring.

Multimodal: To enhance learning, implement the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning pathways simultaneously. Lessons utilize hands-on manipulatives and techniques.

It’s easy to see how these criteria are present in Montessori pedagogy and curriculum.

books. First-year students also utilize a keyword chart to aid in the recall of letter sounds. I also teach them big body gestures to remember vowel sounds and digraphs. When I introduce a new concept, I teach them the movements, and we do the movements together. Over time, using a gradual release of responsibility, the students use the motion with only an initial prompt.

All students receive one or two review words from the previous lesson and two to three heart words. Second and third-year students are only given five words accompanying the rule or pattern in the introductory lesson. First years are given ten. Early in the year, first-year students utilize Elkonin boxes with bingo chips to demonstrate the number of sounds they hear. Later in the year, it



The work journal could also be a good place for spelling practice.

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For advertising information, submission guidelines, or other communications, contact David Ayer at editor@montessoripublic.org.

Editorial Director: David Ayer

Contributors: David Ayer, Katie Brown, Amber Elder, Jennifer Dempsey, Gabriela Iturralde Espejo, Carey Montgomery, Monique O’Grady, Tara Valentine, Jasmine Williams, and Laragene Williams.

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is no longer needed, so the scaffolding crutch is removed. All friends air write and discuss the irregular components of the heart words before writing on paper.

Throughout the rest of the week, students may work with the words through word sorts, phonics exercises on paper, Waseca rainbow boxes, dictation sentences with accompanying illustrations (for first years), and reading and working with the words in text passages.

On Friday, the students have a quiz. First-year friends are quizzed on all ten words from the rule or pattern we studied, the review words from previous concepts, and the heart words. Second and third-year friends are quizzed on the five words I provided them on Monday, plus five other words that follow the rule or pattern, the review words, and the heart words. The “mystery” words that I ask the students to spell on Friday eliminate the rote memorization process and allow for a deeper understanding of the rule or pattern of that week.

The importance of explicit spelling instruction should not be overlooked in the Montessori environment. For young children, research indicates that spelling supports learning to read. For older children, learning about the meaningful

relationships between words will likely contribute to vocabulary growth and reading comprehension.

Do not hesitate to implement practices and approaches because you wonder, “is this Montessori?” It is possible and acceptable to honor and uphold the Montessori pedagogy while implementing instruction not explicitly mentioned in our albums. As Dr. Montessori stated in *The Formation of Man*, “The basis of the reform of education and society which is a necessity of our times must be built upon scientific study.” We must remember that Dr. Montessori was a scientist first and foremost. We should be compelled to utilize instructional practices rooted in scientific research in our environments. Explicit spelling instruction can be integrative, fun, authentic, and purposeful!

Jennifer Dempsey, M.Ed., is a lower elementary guide at the Montessori School of Maui and a doctoral student in the Reading Science program at Mount St. Joseph University.

Integrating the science of reading with Montessori

How we made it work in North Carolina



AMBER ELDER
AND CAREY MONTGOMERY

In the state of North Carolina there are approximately 60 public Montessori schools. Our school, Park Road Montessori, was the first. This year it celebrates its 30th year, not only surviving, but thriving. It is one of four public elementary Montessori schools in the Charlotte Mecklenburg School district, which serves a diverse demographic. The district also offers a secondary Montessori program for grades 7-12. Students can gain a seat through the lottery system from PK-1st grade, and after that there is an interview process. Being in the public school system has meant that advocating to stay true to the Montessori method has always been a necessity. Any time new leaders or new curriculums are introduced, the Montessori program finds itself having to prove what it does and how it meets state standards.

Several years ago, the Montessori administrators in our program returned from training with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector. This training spurred discussions about creating cohesion amongst our schools. In 2021 the district’s Magnet office set out to create a team of public Montessorians to do just that. The team was tasked with developing a document that aligned the Montessori curriculum with NC state standards and the current district curriculums (ILC and Envision). Not only would this document serve as a way to inform district leaders about the Montessori program, but it would also be the foundation for consistency amongst schools in the district.

At the onset of the alignment process there were several factors to consider. The team’s number one goal was advocating to put Montessori first. After that, it was to develop a model that could be used across the district’s four schools to show how state standards are met and to utilize district curriculums

as a resource. Finally, the team knew that the state was requiring all teachers to complete LETRS training from 2021-2023. This came on the heels of the North Carolina State Improvement Project (NCSIP) and their 20 years of researching the Science of Reading and efforts to address dyslexia. The team knew this would be a challenge and also different from anything that had been done before in our Montessori schools. After many discussions understanding our district’s expectations, the CMS Montessori Playbook was born.

The playbook would encompass PK–6th grade, spanning three levels of the Montessori curriculum. Each level in the playbook would include an alignment for language/ELA, math, science, and social studies. The team also advocated for a Peace curriculum section that would cover social-emotional learning requirements. Once the team had everything mapped out, it was evident that language was going to be the biggest undertaking of the areas that would be aligned.

First the team acknowledged the

strengths and weaknesses in comparison to the Science of Reading, starting with the question, “what does Montessori do well?” The team recognized that in Montessori there is a strong phonics program, materials are multisensory, and lessons are taught from concrete to abstract. It was also recognized that vocabulary morphology, etymology and syntax are explicitly taught.

The next step was to ask, what are the weaknesses? Many Montessorians still subscribe to the idea that students will “absorb language” without explicit

Science of reading concepts	Montessori Extensions	Augmentations	Intentional planning
phonological awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">poetry, nursery rhymes, and songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">use evidence-based resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">use evidence-based assessments to target underlying deficits.
phonics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sandpaper Letters—hunts and knock-knockuse extensions so that the student is not just reading the pink, blue, green series or Waseca boxeshave students encode using the moveable alphabetself-check with labels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">have students practice reading the targeted language lesson using decodable readers with reading comprehension questions at the end.teach syllable types to decode and encode multisyllabic words	<ul style="list-style-type: none">integrate high frequency words with direct aim of language lessons for spelling testsfluency
fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">syntax —Sentence Analysispartner readingreading to parent volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">use evidence-based assessments to target underlying deficits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">goal of 95% accuracy indicates a student’s independent reading level90-95% is considered an instructional levelgive students partner reading opportunities
vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">3-part cards extensionMontessori word studyetymologymorphology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">language timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">tie to literature that will reinforce vocabulary students are learning through 3-part cards, science and Montessori cultural work in the classroom.present vocabulary before reading and lessons
comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">book clubsresearch and presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">use evidence-based assessments to target underlying deficits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Montessori is strong with syntax and vocabularybe intentional through query question discussions

instruction. Research shows that 45% of students will learn to read without difficulty, while the other 55% will have difficulty learning to read. Research has also shown that 85% of reading disorders come from the phonological processor and that phonological awareness

determine instructional intervention.

Once strengths and weaknesses were addressed, a letter and language sequence was selected that was evidence-based and not tied to any particular Montessori teacher education program or training center. A “neutral”

We started with the question, “what does Montessori do well?”

is an excellent indicator of reading success. Phonological awareness is present in the Montessori curriculum, but how it is taught and practiced is often up to the individual teacher. These deficits are educational problems, not just felt in the Montessori community.

There is also the notion that if a student can read and decode then they can comprehend. This is not necessarily true, as students do not always comprehend even if they are decoding. In order to determine a student’s independent and instructional reading levels, skills and any underlying deficits, it is necessary to use diagnostic assessments to

sequence was imperative for implementation, fidelity and sustainability. The team then developed a systematic approach that all four elementary schools would follow while still using the Montessori materials and curriculum.

In our design, we used key takeaways from NCSIP. We used our Montessori curriculum and materials to support the children by working with them explicitly on a daily basis to ensure mastery of the content. We made the reading sequence consistent so that it flowed from the classroom to EC (Exceptional Children) and MTSS. Interventions should support and be consistent with

work being done in the classroom

Within the public-school setting and standards, our playbook is designed to ensure that instructional and MTSS goals are met. We use our normed data assessments and formative assessments in addition to classroom observations to determine our classroom instruction.

A big takeaway from the alignment process was that it needed to acknowledge that it was okay to go outside of our Montessori training and use additional resources that explicitly teach how to read and write. It was also clear that the Montessori curriculum had a solid foundation, but there were some areas where instruction needed to be more explicit. Any gaps were eliminated through the ability to add extensions to the Montessori method and materials. This aspect allowed us to incorporate the science of reading with the Montessori curriculum by enhancing and not replacing.

The playbook is now in the implementation phase, with the four schools meeting periodically to provide feedback. While there is still work to be done and the playbook is considered to be a living document, the team ultimately was

able to develop a “Montessori way” for our district. By aligning the Montessori curriculum with state standards, district curriculums, and the science of reading, the playbook has become an invaluable reference tool creating continuity in our program and clarity for district leaders.

Amber Elder, M. A. Ed serves on the MANC board in NC and teaches at Park Road Montessori.

Carey Montgomery, M.A. Ed is a Science of Reading instructor for NCSIP and teaches at Park Road Montessori.



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Whose English is it, anyway?

There's a lot to think about before we begin to speak



JASMINE WILLIAMS

Articulate.

I was about 26 years old the first time someone pointed out that I was articulate.

This was on a trip to Lithuania for a graduate-level disabilities studies class that focused on institutionalized youth in Lithuania and current changes that were supposed to reflect more humane practices toward children, adolescents, and their families in the country over time.

The speaker didn't use the word "articulate"—it was something like, "You

a long way. After my first year of undergraduate education I noticed that I had been "code switching" a lot in class—shifting my language and cultural presentation to match the predominantly white institution I was attending. (There were at most ten Black and Brown students the year I began.)

After I graduated, I taught English in Chile through TESOL (formerly Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages—they go by just their acronym these days). I only realized later how that "O" in TESOL "others" non-English speakers right from the start.

My workshop was inspired by scholar and writer Dr. Jamila Lyiscott who speaks, writes and teaches about racial justice as Associate Professor of Social Justice Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

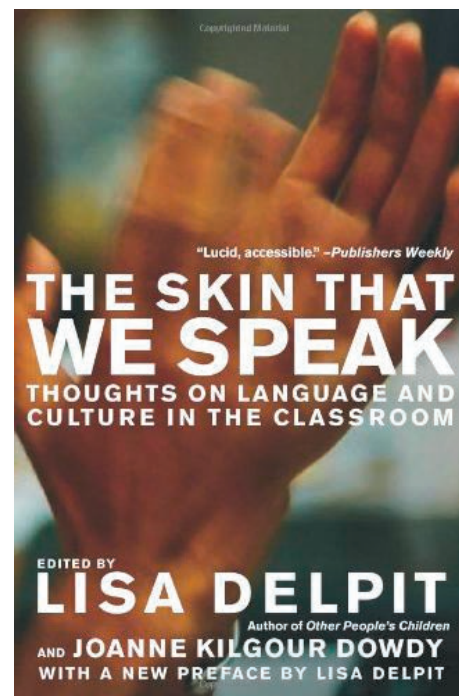
I began by sharing Dr. Lyiscott's 2014 Ted Talk *Three Ways to Speak English*. During her 4 minute 16 second delivery, she provides healing to Black and Brown folx who have been told, in one way or another, that they sound ignorant or speak poorly. She offers speakers of patois and African-American English a different social identity—one of being bilingual or even trilingual. She reminds listeners the cost of coloniality to African Americans specifically, whose mother tongues were "raped" from them as they were taken from their homelands leaving generations thereafter without the knowledge or understanding of what their ancestors spoke or sounded like.

We broke all these aspects down in the session. Attendees shared with one another, listing the countries and/or people whose languages have been removed from them because of colonization. One attendee raised her hand and simply said, "All of them"—a perspective we don't often consider.

Dr. Lyiscott also pointed out that American English, which we in the U.S. consider "standard" or "formal" English, can sound foolish to the British. This took us to a video compilation of the linguist Noam Chomsky speaking about colonization, power, and language. Several times Chomsky makes the point that if Black people today, or perhaps an African tribe, wielded dominant power, African-American English would be the English that we considered standard, the language of academia, and all of the other areas where linguistic hierarchy exists. Chomsky points out that the rules of grammar that we have are of

course arbitrary, yet we cling to them so tightly and we force children and adolescents to conform to arbitrary measures that are really measures of whiteness.

Session attendees walked away with a series of questions created by Dr. Sarina Molina, Associate Dean and Professor in the Department of Learning and Teaching at the University of San Diego, from an article titled *Reducing Colonial Harm in Language Teaching: A Guide to Critical Self-Reflexive Practices for Language Teachers*.



Dr. Molina encourages readers to participate in critical self-reflection and to examine their English teaching and speaking practices located in three areas: identity, coloniality, and pedagogy.

Having readers first examine themselves allows them to examine their connection to and perpetuation of colonial harm in the pedagogy and in the curriculum. It is also important to note that self-reflection alone is not critical

We know that in Montessori we are not short of opportunities to reflect, but whether we do it or not is another story. Reflection is something we are called to do. However, if it's not critical, we continue to reproduce colonial harm. The notion of coloniality is also crucial because we use and teach English with settler colonial mindsets, mentorship, and socialization.

We took the last portion of the session to choose one of the questions to reflect upon. The act of reflecting in this instance also meant writing down versus just thinking. Attendees were asked to reflect on ways they have been complicit in perpetuating colonial harm. Questions like these are never easy to ask because they require you to take a look at yourself and ask yourself if your practices align with your beliefs and values. But this is the work of critical reflection or critical self-reflection.

Does this mean I stopped teaching English in my classroom? Am I suggesting that English is not valid? Unfortunately, because of the system and the world that we live in, English is most definitely valid, but we need to ask ourselves what language and linguistic practices we are invalidating or affirming on a day-to-day basis. Do we offer gentle correction and affirmation when a parent or a co-worker or a caregiver apologizes for their "poor" or "broken" English? Many people have been made to believe that because they don't sound a certain way, they are incapable of being valued for their linguistic ability, or being valued in the same way as the person they are apologizing to. When I became a teacher to speakers of other languages, I myself have had to check myself in these areas—there's that othering "other" again!

The very act of not teaching your students these rules of grammar that they

have to engage with would be a disservice to them. But instead of placing those rules of engagement on a pedestal, a better idea would be to acknowledge and bring in linguistic variety.

Again, they didn't say that outright either. But there were no other Black or Brown people at the table—everyone else there was white, many of them "well-spoken". But no-one else at the table was told they spoke so well.

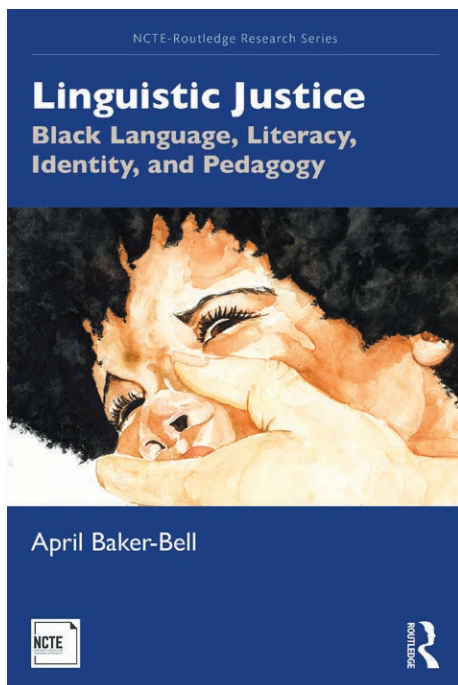
I recently presented a workshop at the AMS Montessori Event titled *Ways to Speak English: Are We Validating or Invalidating Certain Members of Our Community?*

My connection to this topic goes back

It is also important to note that self-reflection alone is not *critical* self-reflection

self-reflection. Critical self-reflection requires an explicit focus on the roles that power and privilege play in institutions and systems and a reflection on ways of being and doing.

have to engage with would be a disservice to them. But instead of placing those rules of engagement on a pedestal, a better idea would be to acknowledge and bring in linguistic variety.



“Translingualism” comes into play here. Translingualism offers speakers the ability to move between languages as they are speaking instead of “code switching”—choosing to use only the dominant linguistic mode when the situation seems to require it. So, instead of holding back from teaching your students English, you could create fun and engaging ways to bring multiple Englishes into the classroom.

A video clip from the television series *Abbott Elementary*, set in a Philadelphia public school, gave an example of what this could mean. In it, the teacher gave her students a bridge between traditional sight words and Philly slang, valorizing an “other” English in which her students were already fluent. I’m not suggesting that you create a material on your shelf about “slaying” for all of the children in the classroom—or perhaps you could!. But teaching needs to be authentic and that authenticity comes from a place of knowing your children. Teachers have to build meaningful ongoing relationships with children, or those materials will serve as a disingenuous checked item in the culturally responsive box.

Judith Baker, in *Trilingualism*, an essay in Lisa Delpit’s collection *The Skin That We Speak* offers this: “When formal English no longer threatens to demean them, students are more than willing to master it. When teachers understand that they cannot force a language form upon their students, those students are more than willing to acknowledge that being ‘trilingual’ — being as proficient in formal English and professional or technical English as they are in their ‘home’ English — can only make them more effective.”

If we welcome other forms of speaking, we will be more likely and willing to

welcome other forms of language construction. This doesn’t mean we say no to teaching English as it is. That would mean we are denying children access to things that would set them up for success in the standardized world. We do, however, release the power and oppression that the English language and its rules wield. If language is thought of and said to be living, then it only lives because we open space for the way it lives in the experiences of the people who speak... which means everyone.

Jasmine Williams serves as Race and Equity Specialist, Montessori Teacher Residency Instructor, and Coach for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

a poem by Finn Chapman

Attendees definitely left with more questions than they had answers and that’s a perfect place to be in. One attendee crafted a poem that captures the tension he felt and is working through.

I teach Language Arts,
what I opined the *art of language*,
and I teach a grammar that holds
the structure of imperialism?

It is a horror I cherish

That gives promises of clarity
but at what cost
and through whose windows

And what are the images
created by my clear syntax
and contrived diction?

What part in this play
of words
should I play?

Making is Knowing

Finn Chapman is the Lead Middle School Teacher at Hilltop Montessori School, a private school in Brattleboro, Vermont.



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My Montessori reading journey

My work took me away from Montessori and back again



TARA VALENTINE

I recently read an article written by AMI Primary trainer Sarah Werner Andrews (“Refining our Practice as Montessori Teachers: Cultivating a Deeper Understanding of the Method, Ourselves, and the Child”, *NAMTA Journal*, Winter 2020) where she encourages us to “rediscover Montessori.” She had been inspired by a 2010 presentation from Italian Montessori scholar Raniero Rengi that closed with this statement: “*To go beyond Montessori is to rediscover Montessori. Montessori is waiting for us.... In the future.*”

This is a description of my own experience as a teacher and struggling with my practices related to teaching of reading. My journey to refine my

in the public sector added to a sense of fluctuation and seeking for strategy outside of the Montessori method.

I had always felt comfortable with the Montessori approach to reading and writing, which is rooted in language development—production of phonemes and a lot of what is now included under the term “the science of reading.” (What is a phoneme? It is defined as “the smallest unit of sound in speech.” For example, the word ‘cat’ contains the three phonemes /c/, /a/, /t/.)

The Montessori language lessons and our understanding of a sequence is a wonderful approach to the teaching of reading. The lessons include ‘pre-reading’ which encompasses many important concepts before we introduce alphabetic symbols. Examples include the “I Spy Game,” rhyming objects or pictures, matching pictures or objects, and of course extensive vocabulary with a rich use of proper nomenclature. A child’s oral language skills are so beautifully addressed in the Montessori classrooms throughout all of our areas with beautiful cards, books and attractive lessons; all based in reality. Research has shown that strong oral language supports later literacy development.

But the Montessori materials, however beautiful and developmentally appropriate, do not always provide a comprehensive path to fluent reading for each student. Data on fluent reading informs us that many students struggle in this area. We all want our young children to learn how to read, and the public school setting brings standards and outcomes that must be met in a

timely manner. Thus, my search to improve ‘reading instruction’ within the Montessori framework began.

“To go beyond Montessori is to rediscover Montessori.”

A journey outside of the Montessori approach began when a colleague introduced me to the work of Diane McGuinness (*Why Our Children Can’t Read and What We Can Do About It* along with Miscese Gagen (*Right Track*

“To go beyond Montessori is to rediscover Montessori. Montessori is waiting for us.... In the future.”

Reading). Both authors write beautifully and extensively about the widespread problems of reading instruction, poor reading outcomes in our elementary schools, and problems with various teaching methods. They also offer clear, legitimate paths to offer instruction that is rooted in the phonetic reading instruction. I began to change my practice; shifting my teaching strategies based upon my reading and attempting to match the demands for “small group” instruction. I was conducting parent education sessions, and working to educate supervisors and decision makers in the district regarding the value, and urgency, of phonetic reading practice.

In the Summer of 2020, I enrolled in a course called *Sound-Write: First Rate Phonics*. This was a summer course and offered a deep and wonderful understanding of phonetic instruction called “linguistic phonics.” As I studied and read, it became clear that this was exactly what Dr. Montessori had understood. The course is rooted in science and research pertaining to synthetic phonics; teaching the connection between phonemes and graphemes explicitly.

This sounded to me very much like the Montessori Sandpaper Letters.

What was I learning? The same principles I had learned in my Montessori teacher training: “It is vital to train children, first, to hear individual sounds in spoken words.” (*The I Spy Game*). Then, “to map those sounds in words to their graphic representations.” (*The Movable Alphabet*). Researchers Eileen Ball and Benita Blachman had written in 1991, “developing an understanding

of the link between the sounds of speech (phonemes) and the signs of print (letters or spellings) is the basic task facing the beginning reader and writer.”

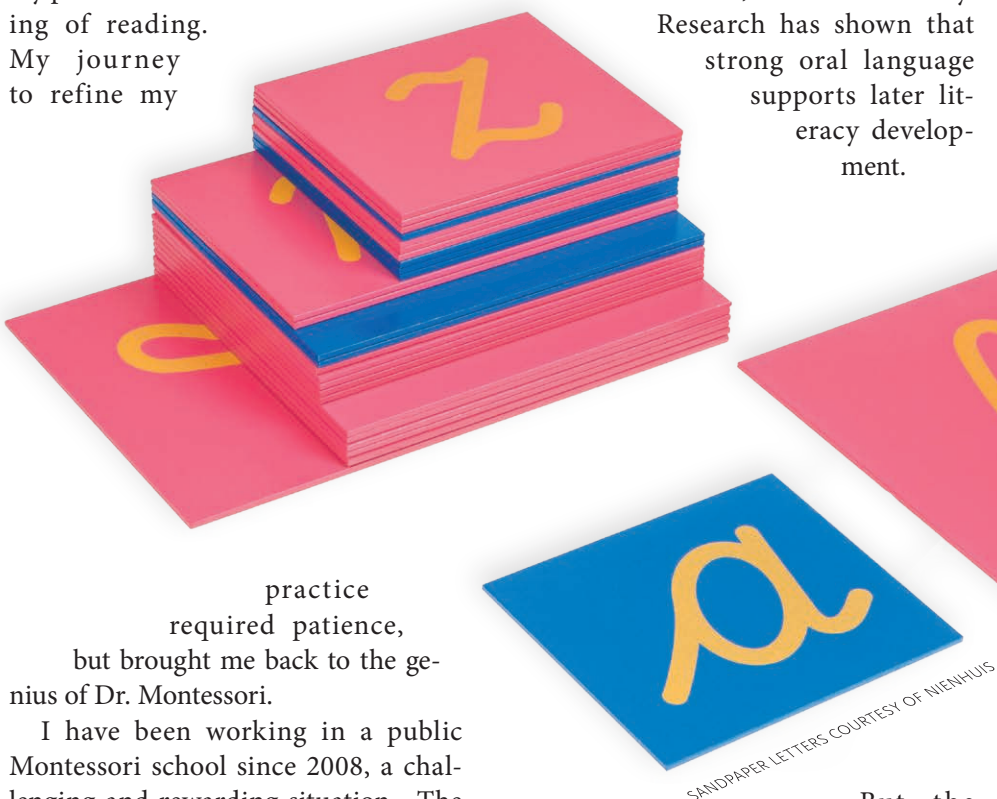
We in the Montessori classroom have the basic Sandpaper Letters, with the beautiful distinction of vowels and consonants, paired with the Green Sandpaper Letters to introduce digraphs, phonograms and alternative spellings.

As I continued in the course, the content brought my mind to *A Path for Exploration of Any Language*, Muriel Dwyer’s program also known as *A Key to Writing and Reading for English*.

Muriel Dwyer outlines a program that aligns surprisingly well with the “new science of reading.” It

was helpful for me to review the Dwyer approach for reading which included her understanding of the complexities of English which is partially phonetic, unlike Italian which was Dr. Montessori’s primary language:

- Spoken language (vocabulary, poems, fingerplays)
- Hearing the sounds of language and all sounds within words (I Spy, other sound games)
- Writing or encoding (Sandpaper Letters, Movable Alphabet, Metal Insets, Green Boards)
- Reading (phonetic word reading, puzzle words)
- Reading Classification (non-phonetic words, little books, Phonogram Folders, Phonogram Dictionary, Spelling, Function of Words, Word Study, Reading Analysis)



practice required patience, but brought me back to the genius of Dr. Montessori.

I have been working in a public Montessori school since 2008, a challenging and rewarding situation. The demands of the public school, rooted in outcomes-based learning, can feel contradictory to the Montessori method. At times, my practice as a Montessori guide was thwarted, and I must admit I struggled with feeling that “Montessori is not enough” and fell into a cycle of trial and error with other methods, practices and learning tools. Reading instruction was no different, and the pendulum swing

But the Montessori materials, however beautiful and developmentally appropriate, do not always provide a comprehensive path to fluent reading for each student. Data on fluent reading informs us that many students struggle in this area. We all want our young children to learn how to read, and the public school setting brings standards and outcomes that must be met in a

A KEY TO WRITING AND READING FOR ENGLISH

As part of the total Montessori Approach to the Development of Language

by

MURIEL I. DWYER

INTRODUCTION MARIO M. MONTESSORI
(reprint from Communications)



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ASSOCIATION MONTESSORI INTERNATIONALE

Interestingly, I had been awe-struck with the idea of the Movable Alphabet when I undertook my Montessori training. My instructor, Sue, said “Montessori understood that writing precedes reading in natural development.” The idea was new to me, but it seemed logical, and it has since been confirmed many times over. Montessori understood, early on, that encoding and decoding are reciprocal processes.

Good reading instruction is based on understanding the sounds or phonemes we hear and utter. Words are built up from there—individual phonemes blended together in a specific manner. My learning curve reiterated the idea that reading and writing are done “one sound at a time.” Internationally recognized language researcher and writer Patricia Kuhl refers to young children as “linguistic geniuses.” Reading is a form of problem-solving, which has as its purpose communication. Reading and writing are social tools for getting things done. Research has shown, repeatedly, the close relationship between phoneme awareness training and learning to read and spell.

The course focused also upon the sensory motor experience as it relates to

reading and writing. Maria Montessori puts it this way in *The Absorbent Mind*: “The hand is the instrument of man’s intelligence.” The course itself called for the children to learn to say the sounds aloud when writing and to form words physically by moving symbols. This tied in exactly to the beauty of the Movable Alphabet along with the importance of letter formation and the link between the hand and the idea that motor activity becomes transformed and internalized into mental operations.

I learned the value of more explicit instruction for some children. I learned that “reading” is in fact not natural for many young children, and direct instruction is important. Many children require support with phonemic awareness, letter formation, alphabetic principle, building words, reading words, and a need for practice as he/she moves toward fluent reading. As Montessorian and BrainHealth Initiative faculty Julia Volkman says “practice makes permanent,” and practice with correct reading skills and exercises is vital.

My own journey through various proponents of phonetic instruction was valuable; it deepened my understanding of how children learn how to read.

It empowered me to speak to all of the “whys” of what we use and the power behind each material on our language shelves. My journey also brought me back to the “genius” of the Montessori materials and sequence. Dr. Maria Montessori understood many components that manufactured curricula often neglect.

For a time, I had lost sight of the depth of the Montessori method and what it does offer. My school district, and the curriculum, began to change and swing towards a phonetic based approach. We began to understand the value of the Montessori lessons, but also a need for a deeper understanding that we may not reach each student within a prescribed time period. In my case, a Montessori classroom, coupled with a deeper understanding, improved my practice as well as student outcomes. This is an important shift for all of the students including those in classrooms outside of our Montessori programs. The nation seems to be catching on to what Montessori knew all along.

Tara Valentine teaches at Parkside Montessori, a magnet school in San Mateo, California.

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The science of reading for bilingual children



¡Me siento orgullosa de mi trabajo!

Continued from page 1

the possibility of finding a program that is easily aligned to the Montessori curriculum.

In addition, the “bilingual” programs are not biliteracy curricula; they are two monolingual programs paired while offering minimum guidance on how to implement them together. They tend to be duplicative and if implemented with fidelity require twice the time to cover all the content in both languages.

Implementing a traditional program in a Montessori environment is challenging in multiple ways. First, most curricula are designed for one grade, rather than for a multigrade classroom. Second, they have highly scripted curriculum-centered approaches which are contrary to Montessori’s child-centered approach. They assume that the curriculum knows more than the guide does about the children in the class. Third, the majority of the instruction is in whole group with limited differentiation. One of Montessori’s strengths is having small group highly individualized lessons. Fourth, the lessons are fragmented by skill (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) as opposed to Montessori’s comprehensive approach with real life connections. Finally, as dual language educators, we face the challenge of implementing a program designed for monolingual students with emergent bilingual learners.

Current approved programs over-emphasize the word/letter recognition

(phonics) part of the Simple View of Reading and Scarborough’s Reading Rope, leaving little room for language development and comprehension. This, despite the fact that we know that meaning-making is most essential for emergent bilinguals. These programs ignore the research on the bilingual brain, biliteracy development, and other linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and academic variables that make learning to read in a second language more complex. It is up to us, therefore, to forefront comprehension and meaning. We need to use the children’s background knowledge and cultural experiences as foundations for meaning-making when teaching reading foundational skills in an unfamiliar language.

Implementation of approved assessments

I am not against progress monitoring students’ learning with research-based assessments or using data to guide instruction; it is not different from Montessori’s scientific observation. What I criticize is the lack of comprehensive assessments in both languages and the quality of the Spanish assessments available, which oftentimes are translations from English that do not correspond to the Spanish language culture, structure, and pedagogy.

The approved tests are designed to measure monolingual students’ reading growth and achievement. However, research shows that biliteracy development is different. A biliteracy trajectory

takes time. We have conclusive evidence, however, that in the long term biliterate children who are educated in dual language models exceed the academic expectations set for their monolingual peers.

Current assessments, designed and normed on monolingual English speaking students, often indicate that bilingually educated students are behind, when in fact they are experiencing a normal biliterate trajectory. Besides, even when the tests provide useful information to guide instruction, testing is time consuming. The time used for testing could be better used to give lessons and monitor the children’s progress following a holistic evaluation strategy with the scientific observation at the core.

The science of reading training requirement

The Colorado READ Act, like legislation in many other states, requires teachers to be trained in the SOR. At our school, we adopted the LETRS training (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). We recognized that it was not simply a program. Rather, it consists of a professional training that

provides teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to teach reading successfully using any curriculum, including Montessori. Despite some initial resistance from the Montessori guides, we have found LETRS content to be valuable and a good complement to the Montessori training. Nevertheless, it is designed with the needs of the traditional English only classrooms in mind. There is a need to bridge the SOR and Montessori, and in our case, the SOR and biliteracy pedagogies.

Lessons learned, success and next steps

We have been learning as we go, with some successes and some areas for growth. We have been faithful to our program by protecting an uninterrupted three-hour Montessori work cycle in the morning. In the afternoon, we have allocated time for a (bi)literacy block while we work on the alignment between the approved program in both languages, the Montessori curriculum and the state standards (based on the NCMPs Montessori Curriculum to Standards Alignment). We recognize this is not ideal, but we are hopeful that



La concentración mental y la motricidad fina en acción.

the alignment, in addition to all staff being trained in LETRS by our own LETRS-certified facilitators who support the integration of the SOR with Montessori and biliteracy pedagogies, will help us have, in the long term, better prepared adults to teach our children.

Another success has been complementing the assessment data with the Montessori scientific observation and using it to follow the child. We intentionally look at both languages' development to ensure the children are following their bilingual trajectory. In upper elementary, most of our children are reading at or above grade level (Dibels) and as would be predicted by a biliteracy trajectory. We are working to find better authentic assessments to measure Spanish literacy growth.

Strategies for emergent bilingual children

I recognize that not all Montessori schools are bilingual, but all of them have emergent bilingual children. Montessori guides can help emergent

bilingual children of any language by using some second language acquisition strategies even if they do not speak the other language themselves.

The National Committee for Effective Literacy released a research and policy overview in 2022 (*Toward Comprehensive Effective Literacy Policy and Instruction for English Learner/ Emergent Bilingual Students*, available at multilingualliteracy.org/resources/) which includes some useful strategies.

First, use a comprehensive approach prioritizing communication and meaning making, integrating all reading skills and subject areas in a meaningful context, while accepting that the pacing may be different.

Second, leverage home language skills that transfer by identifying the similarities between languages and explicitly teaching the differences, using cognates, prefixes, suffixes, etc., and welcoming children's diverse background knowledge.

Third, promote oral language development by providing multiple

opportunities to use oral language and acquire vocabulary. One key element of literacy development is language comprehension. One cannot comprehend or express in writing what cannot be comprehended or expressed orally.

Fourth, value diversity and make cross-language and cross-cultural connections through an inclusive curriculum and socio-cultural responsive practices. Link foundational skills to ideas, concepts, and materials that are culturally familiar.

The education of the whole child requires us to think carefully about curricula, testing, and the SOR while remaining true to Montessori. The SOR can provide knowledge and insights with the potential to enhance the Montessori curriculum. However, the SOR does not provide all the answers especially for implementation following the Montessori principles of individualization, independence, free choice, holistic education, multigrade classrooms, and authentic and context based approach.

In the case of biliteracy development,

it is important to be aware that the "science" used to support these efforts was primarily conducted with monolingual speakers of English. Even though the research available so far about biliteracy is strong, we do not yet have a sufficiently robust "Science of Biliteracy" related to the acquisition of foundational skills. We do know, however, that bilingual learners bring many assets to our environments and when provided with educational opportunities that capitalize on the languages and cultures that they contribute, they thrive. It may be hard to put all these pieces together and it may take a village, but it is feasible and worth it. I hope we continue finding mirrors, windows, and an open conversation for the good of our programs and children.

Gabriela Iturralde Espejo serves as Bi-Literacy Coordinator at Montessori del Mundo, a public charter in Aurora, Colorado, and a PhD student in the Equity, Bilingualism and Biliteracy program at the University of Colorado Boulder.

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more info



Creating demand for public Montessori

Continued from page 1

This is amazing!” So I tell people, I’m a Montessori convert. When I experienced it through my child’s eyes I was blown away.

MP: Where did that take you? What kind of work were you doing then?

M O’G: I was a Washington Bureau chief for a bunch of Midwest TV stations. I was working on Capitol Hill, just being

cross-cultural relationships that really influence who my children are today.

MP: And that carries through into the elementary because once you’re in you’re in?

M O’G: Right, if you get into the Montessori Public School of Arlington (MPSA) you can stay through 8th grade and once you get to kindergarten it’s tuition-free. They had—still have—several Montessori pre-K classrooms scattered

into public relations, where I’ve been ever since.

But around that time we had a third child, and of course I wanted him to have the opportunity for Montessori, so we put him in the lottery. But his sister had aged out of the school, so he no longer had sibling preference, and even though I had helped create AMAC, he didn’t get in! So out of my strong desire for him to have Montessori, I put him in private school, Full Circle Montessori here in Arlington. I would have to say, at the time I was kind of devastated, but it was probably one of the most important things that happened. Because it gave me this authentic experience of being in a great private school as well, which was helpful for me to understand Montessori from both sides.

I have never been a teacher—just a Montessori-enthusiastic parent—but I’ve spent a lot of time trying to support teachers and schools and doing advocacy around how to promote and build Montessori in a way that benefits families in the Arlington area and beyond.

Also around that time, we had been working to start a Montessori middle school program. And when we finally got a pilot program, my second daughter was one of two kids to start the program. I think it’s been around now for 12 years and my son had the opportunity to go all the way through it through 8th grade.

So I saw it when it was just a little tiny program with my oldest child, who’s 10 years older than my youngest. And then I got to see AMAC advocate to create a middle school program that’s now been in place for over a decade.

MP: So how did NCMPS come into the picture for you?

M O’G: Well, as we were trying to grow the program, NCMPS co-founder Jackie Cossentino was kind enough to do live talkbacks for parents. I wanted people to be able to ask a national leader in public Montessori, “What should we be expecting? How can we make our program stronger? How do we support our teachers? How do we get our district to support our program in the best way?”

I used to do an AMAC holiday cookie party where we invited every teacher to my home to meet each other and talk about issues or just have fellowship, and one year Jackie came! So I’ve always had a soft spot in my heart for the National Center. I was really thrilled when I was approached about potentially being on the board.

MP: So as a Board member and a public relations professional, and Montessori advocate, let me ask you this: What does public Montessori need to do to expand our reach?

The more we can get parents excited about what Montessori has to offer, the more Montessori we will see

a regular parent and a journalist and trying to figure out the best place to put my child. But I started to learn more and more about Montessori. Then my second child came along and she got into the program and it was good for her as well. As my children moved through the program, I just continued to fall in love with it.

As I learned more and saw this incredibly diverse program really work for my kids, I thought, “I need to make sure other people learn about this and see what a great opportunity it is. At the time it was one of Arlington’s best kept secrets, and it was just starting to grow, and I was really intent on making sure that people knew they had that choice in Arlington. I thought if they chose it they wouldn’t regret it.

MP: You mentioned “incredibly diverse.” Say more about that.

M O’G: One of the things I love about the program is the way that it’s structured to have diverse participation. The public funding starts at kindergarten, so the school charges tuition for three and four-year-olds. But two-thirds of the slots are reserved for families that come from 80% or below median income, and then one-third for people who come from a higher income. And the tuition is on a sliding scale from something that lower-income families can afford up through what a family would pay in a private Montessori school. What I have seen that structure do is to create understanding, empathy, equity, and

around the county in neighborhood schools. Those students have preference in the 1st grade lottery to get into MPSA. I happened to be one of the lucky ones who was able to get into the program that matriculated all the way through 5th grade without having to reapply. My kids had the benefit of learning from some fabulous teachers in their primary, lower elementary, and upper elementary experience in Arlington.

Then as I learned more about the program I had that enthusiasm about ensuring that more people knew about it—and that also the county knew how spectacular the program was. So I worked with a fellow parent, Karla Hagan, to create a nonprofit called the Arlington Montessori Action Committee (AMAC) to promote Montessori, public and private, in Arlington so other parents would know that this is a choice.

MP: Have you continued working in journalism or did you move to an education role?

M O’G: No, I was a journalist until about 2006, and then moved



More Montessori we would love to see

M O'G: One area we can improve on as Montessori leaders is to involve parents more. Parents are a really important catalyst for getting people to understand how beneficial Montessori can be, and for explaining that to decision makers. I was on the school board in Arlington, so I thought a lot about how to explain the benefits of Montessori to elected officials, who have the ability to start or advance programs in their community. Parents are our best advocates and best supporters of our teachers. So the more we can get parents excited about what Montessori has to offer, the more Montessori we will see.

MP: So what are the steps for that? How do we reach those parents, or how do we catalyze parents who right now don't know they want Montessori because they don't know what it is?

M O'G: I do think that there are opportunities, and I do believe that parents can be enthusiastic about it. We need to figure out ways to bring them together to talk and help them tell their stories. And just as important, we need to figure out ways to have our children who have finished high school tell their story. We did that at the NCMPs Conference in Asheville last year with funders. I brought together my son and some of his friends to do a talk back about how important Montessori was to them and how it helped them successfully manage virtual learning, how it helped them through middle school or high school. We heard from students who were going to Yale, UVA, Syracuse—all over.

As a journalist and a public relations professional I think storytelling can change hearts and minds.

MP: There's been some of this in the Montessori world, but of course a lot of that is private schools making videos for their websites which may give a different image from what we're going for.

M O'G: I see that, but I would still try to get the communications across the Montessori world working together and pulling together.

And I can see the tension between public and private Montessori, because I helped start AMAC and I was a public parent who could not get my child into one of the few spaces available, so I went and spent a lot of money on private. But one thing we can all agree on in Arlington is that the growth of public helped spur the growth of private.

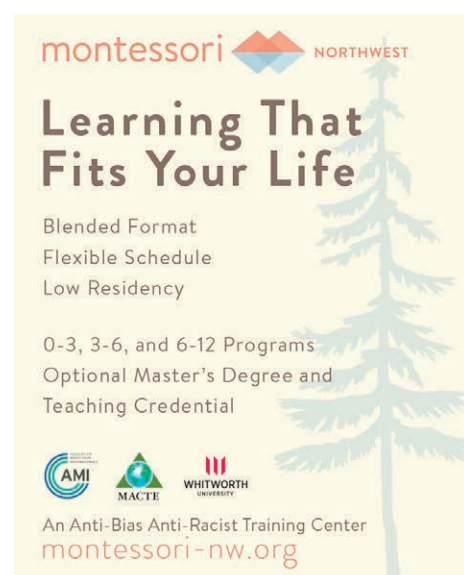
One didn't take a hit because of the other. Both have benefited, because

when you create the demand for public Montessori you can never meet the demand, and because you cannot fully meet the demand, and because of the way we set up the program, there are very few spaces for people who could otherwise pay for private. So it increased the demand for private as well as for public.

MP: Say more!

M O'G: Creating demand creates demand. Across public and private that's what we found in Arlington. Currently we have about 500 students in just one school in Arlington and several smaller programs around the county. But in the time I've been here I have seen so many private schools pop up, and they've grown from just pre-K centers to actually offering elementary as well. Why? Because people get on the wait list, and then we have hundreds of kids who want to be in our program, whose parents apply every year, and they can't get in because spaces are limited. And the private schools benefit from that because we create the understanding and the demand but we can't fill it all.

MP: If the model is so popular and schools have huge waiting lists, which they do, and people see it and they have the same reaction you did, like



“Wait—what is going on here,” why isn't this taking off everywhere?

M O'G: Well, we have to build demand everywhere. And it means new systems for districts, and we need more teachers, so there are barriers.

And one of the things I'm most excited about is a private entity acting like a public institution. We're seeing this with the Bezos Academies. I love the idea that the Bezos Academies are offering free Montessori-style preschool to families who otherwise couldn't afford it, and they're getting communities to accept the idea of free Montessori preschool. That is creating a new demand.

So what happens when those kids exit that program? What do they do with all that great Montessori-minded education and understanding? Bezos is opening a door that can be leveraged to build public Montessori because it's offering almost the equivalent of public preschool Montessori in communities that maybe aren't used to having it. So the question becomes what can we do with that? How do we build on this and ask, how do we continue to educate those lucky children in communities that are now

more knowledgeable about Montessori? Is there a way for us to build off of that excitement now as schools are opening so that by the time those children come through the two years Bezos offers for free—could they land in new public Montessori PK classrooms and be the children who've had two years of experience who can help the other children move along and understand the materials and everything else that goes with?

There's just a lot more storytelling we could do. We could get in front of the National School Boards Association. We can go to districts and help them understand that Montessori can solve some of their problems—maybe they want to draw families in. Maybe they have equity and diversity concerns. Maybe they want social emotional learning. Montessori can fill a need in every district.

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

Monique O'Grady works in communications at a national nonprofit organization in Washington, DC.

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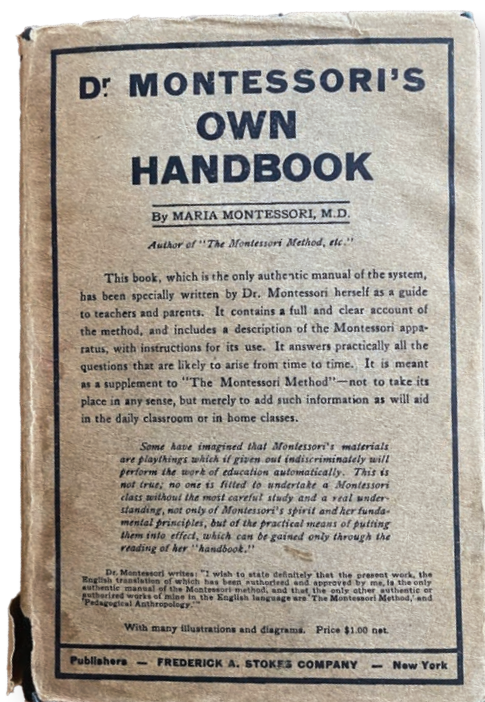
Montessori gets a new Handbook

Continued from page 3

they would follow that with, ‘And we’re really surprised you’re here—I thought this was just this sort of fringe private school thing that didn’t really participate in kind of the academic world, but here you are and—wait there’s a journal? How come I’ve never heard of this?’”

But one of the people who came by the booth was an acquisitions editor from Bloomsbury Academic Publishing. Bloomsbury is a leading publishing house perhaps best known as the U.K. publisher of the Harry Potter books, but their interest in Montessori arose from their Bloomsbury Handbook academic series. “Bloomsbury Handbooks is a series of single-volume reference works which map the parameters of a discipline or sub-discipline and present the ‘state-of-the-art’ in terms of research,” according to their website, and the titles run the gamut from *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Contemporary American Poetry* to *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory*, with stops along the way for Handbooks on Hip Hop Pedagogy, Japanese Religions, and Socrates.

Bloomsbury Handbooks are academic reference works, intended for use in colleges and universities, which give a scholarly orientation and treatment to the broad outlines of a subject, identifying key issues and suggesting the landscape for future research. This is the kind of thing that has been missing from the Montessori research world.



The Montessori Handbook, 1913 edition



The Montessori Handbook in good company

Bloomsbury, of course, doesn’t bother publishing books they don’t think will sell (and the book is not inexpensive, at \$157.50 for the hardback), so this yet another sign that Montessori is being taken seriously.

Bloomsbury expressed strong interest in a Montessori Handbook, soliciting a proposal, and Murray jumped at the chance. At a fall 2019 retreat, the research working group put together a table of contents and a structure to propose. Several considerations were prominent in the discussion. First, it was important that the work be scholarly and critical, not just celebratory, in order to be taken seriously. That meant seeking out experts in various areas and not shying away from challenges or limitations in Montessori.

It was also important, from Bloomsbury’s perspective as an international publisher, and from a Montessori perspective, that the work be global in scope, so the group reached out to writers and editors from around the world, especially the vibrant world of

European Montessori scholarship, but also from everywhere Montessori is practiced. Although the work largely steers clear of the Montessori partisanship prominent in U.S. circles, representatives from both AMI and AMS, as well as other Montessori organizations, were closely involved.

chapters in six main sections. The book launched at the AMS Event in March, and is available for sale now.

So what’s in the book?

The first section, “Foundations and Evolution of Montessori Education,” comprises four chapters introducing Montessori’s life and work, going “be-

School leaders, public and private, should buy this book

The proposal wasn’t a formality Murray told me. “They didn’t just say, ‘OK, yes please, go write it’—we had to put together a pretty extensive proposal where we had abstracts written for all of the chapters we were proposing and that was unanimously approved by Bloomsbury. They were really enthusiastic about it so that was really pretty exciting.” Then the team got to work, writing, editing, and assembling what became a 600+ page book with 62

yond Montessori as an educator toward a broader history of Montessori honoring her contributions as a philosopher, feminist, and political agent,” and featuring contributions from Swedish, Italian, and American scholars. Montessorians familiar with E.M. Standing’s and Rita Kramer’s more widely known biographies may find new perspectives here on the intersection of early 20th century political and social movements and Montessori’s work.

Part II, Key Writings of Maria Montessori, does what few treatments of her work have done before: place them in chronological and thematic context and provide background for when, where, how, and why they were composed and published. Seven chapters sort her works into Origins of the Pedagogy, School Years, What is Childhood, Math and Grammar, Peace Education, Philosophical Writings, and Societal Responsibility and the Child. Again, readers familiar with her work are likely to find new insights and areas of inquiry. And again, contributions from scholars outside the U.S. provide depth and specificity.

Part III, Montessori Pedagogy Across the Lifespan, walks us through the planes of development. While the contributions from Montessori trainers at various levels and from diverse branches of Montessori are of course instructive, it's again the perspectives of scholars from "outside Montessori" that were most illuminating. After all, people encountering Montessori for the first time aren't Montessorians! To read an analysis of the pedagogy from a scholar who studies and analyzes multiple pedagogies is to understand our work through the eyes of a well-educated outsider, and helps us immediately see the strengths and weaknesses others will see in the approach.

Part IV concerns The Science of Montessori Education, and this is where the work may generate some serious interest and activity in the education world. The first three sections do an admirable job of representing Montessori and her work as a substantial subject worthy of scholarly inquiry, rather than

a niche approach or an historical curiosity. The editors are explicit: "We intend for the works here to lead readers to additional researchers and source material in the field. Most importantly, we hope these contributions spark readers' interest in continuing to develop, conduct, and participate in high-quality research related to Montessori education."

Ten chapters cover neuroscience, research methods, fidelity, efficacy, assessment, error monitoring, cognitive science, executive functions, motivation, and flow. The past decades of often lonely work by individuals and teams of researchers have brought us to the point where these chapters could be written, and the attention of a publisher such as Bloomsbury could be attracted.

Part V extends the relevance and scope of Montessori education with a survey of Global Montessori Education, with 23 chapters replete with images from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America, as well as chapters on Educateurs Sans Frontières and Future Directions for Global Montessori Research.

Part VI closes the book with Contemporary Considerations Regarding Montessori Education, with chapters on the Digital Age, Teacher Education, Gender, Inclusion, Multilingualism, Plurilingualism, Critical Race Theory, Indigenous Montessori, Dementia, and Ecoliteracy. Here too readers may find aspects of Montessori they may not have previously considered or seen articulated at this level of discourse, and researchers will surely find new topics and directions for exploration and study.

So how can people get their hands on

the book? As mentioned above, the book is on sale now at \$157.50 for hardback, \$126 for an e-book, which may be a lot to spend if you are not a university library. This is an institutional resource, and institutions will need to make the purchase and help make it available to individuals. School leaders, public and private, should buy this book—and lend it out to families and staff. Training centers should buy this book—and assign chapters as reading for prospective teachers. Colleges and universities should buy this book—and place it in their libraries, and use it in coursework. And anyone with a serious interest in Montessori education should really consider adding it to their library. It's that good, that comprehensive, and that important.

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

Angela Murray is the director of the University of Kansas Achievement & Assessment Institute's Center for Montessori Research.



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Montessori Therapy is coming to America

A new role to support students with more diverse needs



LARAGENE WILLIAMS

How quickly the world can turn sideways. In 1990 when my second son was born. That sweet, beautiful boy had some trouble. From the beginning there were signs of sensory dysfunction and by one year we knew that he was having issues with his development. By two years we were clear that his speech was not developing properly. He would be four or five before the developmental pediatrician finally diagnosed him with global apraxia of speech, dyslexia, and ADHD. The motor planning and sensory dysfunction was affecting all areas of his development and learning.

As renowned Montessori inclusion trainer, Prof. Joachim Dattke expresses it, I would “need help climbing out of the valley of tears” again and again and again. We were thankful to have been referred to a small and nurturing Montessori environment. And for the next six years, we were grateful for what he gained in this environment, where we were constantly adjusting, and observing and experimenting with each new understanding to meet my son in his world. For this wildly enthusiastic boy there was a healthy spirit of joy between struggles, hopeful moments, and hard, tearful exhausting days, at times, for all involved.

A new occupation, Montessori Therapist, will exist in the U.S.

It was there in that little Montessori setting, that I knew I had found the work that I could spend the rest of my life committed to. In 2004 I traveled to New York for the Montessori 3-6 courses. When it was time to do my practicum, I chose a position at a large public charter Montessori school, where my son continued in primary through his seventh year.

Unfortunately, as it is for many children with significant learning and

behavioral challenges, it was not recommended that he move on to the Montessori elementary level. It was believed that traditional public schools offered a more therapeutic intervention. I continued at the charter school while my son, who was supposed to be receiving therapeutic services, instead spent five traumatic years in several different self-contained, special education classrooms without any progress.

Finally, with state funds made available to homeschool, I left my classroom and came home with my son, then 12. We began again, right where he left off in Montessori, at home, piecing together Montessori material and method with a mixture of Orton-Gillingham tutors, medical therapists, and inclusive community activities such as social dance, music, meditation, physical fitness, gardening, sewing, even a chicken coop.

It was during this time that I became acquainted with the work of the Montessori Medical Partnership for Inclusion and the Helbrugge Inclusive Montessori model. Something wonderful was beginning to shift. Now my son is 23 and employed part time, as new frontiers in inclusive Montessori education are just opening in the United States.

The Helbrugge model, described in *MontessoriPublic* in 2019 (“Montessori inclusion training in Milwaukee”), and in 2021 (“Medical partnership for inclusion returns online”), is a Montessori-inspired approach to inclusion developed in Germany in the 1970s to support inclusion of children with disabilities into Montessori environments. It supports early detection and critical interventions in the Montessori setting,

and direct support of families, who play a key role applying interventions in the home, through the activities of daily life

Dr. Montessori herself began her work in the Orthophrenic school for children who had been institutionalized or abandoned, observing their development in response to materials and methods that she had borrowed from Seguin and created herself. We now need to re-adapt the lessons and materials in our albums with the aid of current developmental



Barbara Luborsky and Catherine Massie, Co-Directors of Montessori Medical Partnerships for Inclusion (MMPI)

sciences and informed observation of the child. Only then can we see the child where he is, understand his needs, and see his potential emerge in response to the adapted, modified material and additional lessons and materials we present. This was Dr. Montessori’s intent to meet the child in whatever way possible. She never meant to leave them behind.

The hope is that we are shifting our perspective as Montessorians to see that inclusion can deepen our understanding of human development and what Montessori called an “aid to Life”. Inclusive practice means bringing more information and support to guides, lessening fears and anxieties associated with the efforts needed, and helping to create interdisciplinary teams that can wrap around that child as they move through the Montessori environments on to adulthood, revealing their true personality and defining independence as it relates to them.

Do not forget the children that work in the midst of children with

disabilities, who are finding opportunities to lead, teach and guide and become patient and understanding cohorts. The collaboration and peer mentorship Montessori built into her work is alive in this inclusive environment. It benefits all children in their social and emotional growth, making them more resilient, empathic leaders in their new communities. What could happen in our diverse adult communities when we model the kind of inclusion we hope to see in the world within the walls of the Casa, from the beginning?

The role of Montessori Therapist arose from Helbrugge’s work—a person trained to aid social integration and inclusion at all ages in a Montessori setting. In the first Integrated School, Aktion Sonnenschein, where children of various abilities worked side by side, it became clear that additional assistants would be needed and that individuals with special training would be able to help in the adaptation of Montessori materials in very specific ways to meet the

needs of the child. So arose a new field of study: Montessori Therapy as a multidimensional functional complex therapy.

Catherine Massie and Barbara Luborsky, Co-Directors of Montessori Medical Partnerships for Inclusion (MMPI) have worked to bring Helbrugge's Montessori Inclusion model to the U.S. Now they are working on a Montessori Therapy initiative, to scale-up Inclusive Montessori education to serve children with more diverse and complex developmental needs like my son's. Through their worldwide network of Montessori Inclusion advocates, MMPI has received incredible excitement for the Montessori Therapy in English training. Catherine has been in communication with the Montessori Therapy training organization in Germany since 2020, working to bring this course to American Montessorians and other English-speakers.

The 2023-2025 Training Course will be presented online for the first time and will include two in-person summer trips to Germany for practical, hands-on work. The course lecturers come from a wide range of specialties in developmental medicine, social pediatric developmental rehabilitation, developmental psychology, and neuropsychology, and include experts and therapists that specialize in ADHD, trauma, speech and language disorders, sensor-motor disorders, autism, dementia, inclusion pedagogy and nutrition. The online modules, practical modules, and independent case study work together provide 750 hours of theory and practice over two years. Students will graduate in Germany with a Montessori Therapy diploma. The Montessori Therapist will be trained to work with children and young adults with varied and multiple disabilities, their families, and caregivers—both independently and in an Inclusive Montessori setting. Help is on the way!

And so, there will exist a new Occupation in the US. The Montessori Therapists through this training will be able to provide an independent form of therapy through a Montessori lens that supports the child's inclusion within the family, the school, and the community. They will be specifically trained to support the social integration and development of the child or young adult in the Inclusive Montessori setting, including the ability to make adaptations to Montessori lessons and materials or integrating therapeutic materials into the Montessori environment. They will provide valuable support to interdisciplinary teams that include parents and

family, medical professionals, therapists, and special educators, administration, and support staff that can serve as a life-long support to individuals with various neurological differences, developmental disabilities, and learning disabilities. The Montessori Therapy is a Lifespan therapy and even provides an orientation to aiding the lives of our elderly community members, including those with dementia.

How happy I am to have found myself serendipitously alongside pioneers of an emerging movement toward Inclusion

in the Montessori Environment in the United States and around the world—a movement that seeks to return even more deeply to Montessori's philosophy and method that originated from her work with differently abled children. Soon, children with development disabilities and neurological differences, much like those that initially inspired Montessori's work and method, and like my son, will be able to return to the Montessori environment to learn and develop alongside their peers in an environment perfectly suited for every

child but with the support of specifically trained Montessori Therapists. If you are interested in this work, you can find out more at Montessori4Inclusion.org. Join Us or Follow Us to a more inclusive Montessori future, where peaceful inclusive communities are created!

Laragene Williams is an artist, a mother, a Montessori early childhood educator, and an advocate for Inclusive Montessori settings and the children that will be served by them.

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Emerging Public Montessori research

Four new studies from the AMS Montessori Event poster session



KATIE BROWN

Four new studies from the poster session at the American Montessori Society’s Montessori Event in March suggest promising avenues for public Montessori research and growth.

The research poster session has been a component of the Event since 2019, allowing researchers studying topics pertinent to Montessori to share their work with practitioners in the field in an informal, conversational way. Researchers create a three-by-four-foot poster outlining their research questions, methods, and findings. These posters are displayed on large bulletin boards, and participants can walk around the venue, read the posters, and talk to the authors about their work. This year’s poster session featured four projects with particular salience for public Montessori educators and advocates.

Public Montessori students shown better outcomes

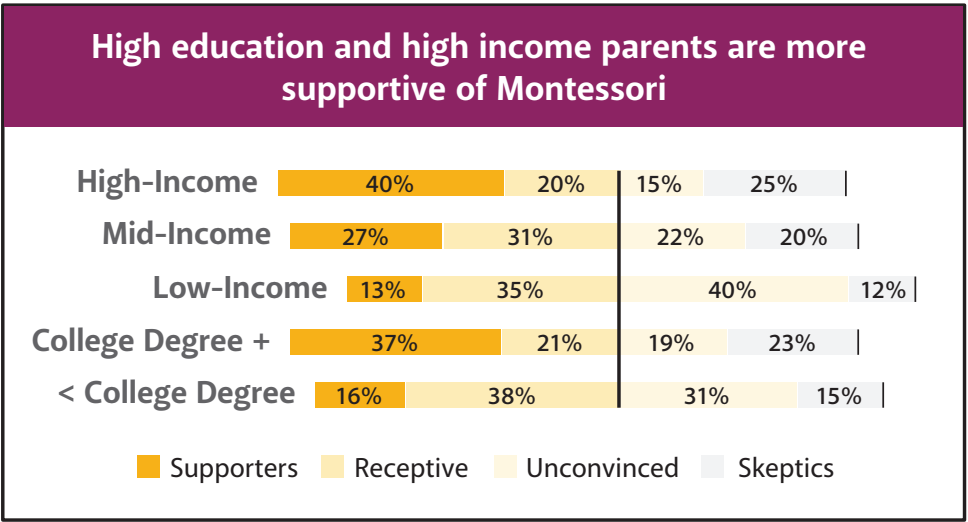
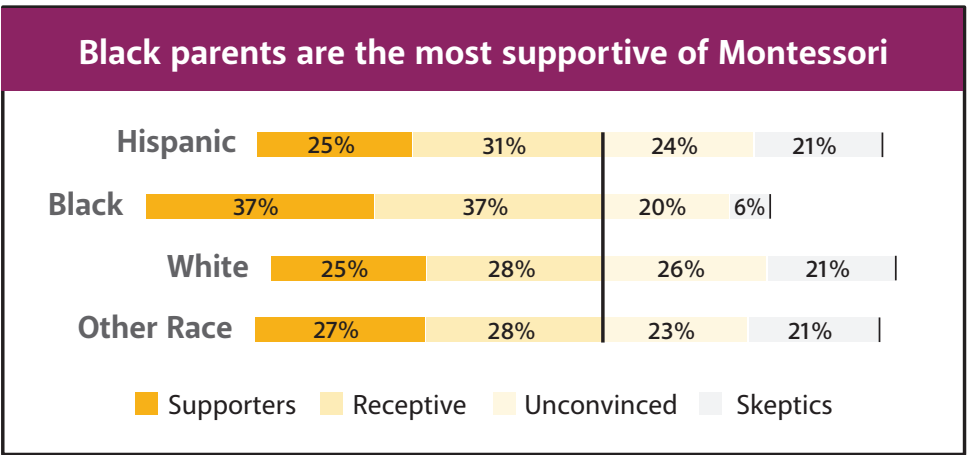
Dr. David Fleming presented a collaborative project with his Furman University colleague, Dr. Brooke Culclasure, examining academic

outcome and engagement metrics for over 18,000 Montessori students across four states (*A Multi-State Analysis of Public Montessori Programs*). In every case where a comparison could be made, Montessori students fared as well as or better than their counterparts in non-Montessori schools.

The researchers found that public Montessori students, as a group, were not demographically representative of the states as a whole; White students and economically disadvantaged students were overrepresented in the Montessori schools. Because of this overrepresentation, the researchers created a demographically matched comparison group to look at outcomes across Montessori and non-Montessori settings. They tested for differences in performance on language arts and math standardized tests; attendance; chronic absenteeism; and disciplinary events, including in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

- Overall, Montessori students:
- performed better on English language arts assessments,
 - demonstrated higher rates of attendance
 - were less likely to experience chronic absenteeism
 - had fewer disciplinary incidents than non-Montessori students

When the results were disaggregated by subgroup, these results held for Black, white, and economically disadvantaged students. There were no differences in language arts outcomes for Hispanic students, Asian students, and



students of other races in Montessori and non-Montessori settings, though Hispanic students and students of other races did have better disciplinary outcomes in Montessori contexts.

The authors conclude that the Montessori programs examined in this study were quite racially and socio-economically diverse, though White students were overrepresented in three of the four states studied. Though the academic achievement comparisons were not a slam dunk for Montessori, “at a minimum, these analyses suggest that any positive effects associated with Montessori participation are not limited to White or high-income students.” In particular, the results pertaining to attendance and school discipline suggest that Montessori programs may produce higher levels of engagement and belonging in schools.

Research posters are not the same as published, peer-reviewed studies, but if these results hold through the submission process, now underway, they will be very strong for public Montessori.

Who knows affects who goes

One reason for the under-representation of Black students in public

Montessori schools could be that this group is less aware of Montessori as an option. Another could be Black families’ levels of support for Montessori. Another poster dug into these questions and found some surprising answers.

Dr. David Fleming’s study *Who Knows Affects Who Goes: How Race and Income Influence Public Opinion on Montessori Education* investigates parents’ levels of knowledge and support for Montessori education, including how these factors vary by subgroup within the US parent population.

Researchers surveyed a national sample of 750 parents of children under 18. Almost 50% of participating parents reported that they were at least “slightly knowledgeable” about Montessori, and their performance on a nine-question quiz about Montessori suggests this is true: on average, they answered about half of these true/false questions correctly. Parents without prior knowledge of Montessori were then provided with a brief description of the approach, and asked if they would support it. Overall, Montessori had a fairly high level of support both among parents who were (58%) and were not (54%) initially knowledgeable about the method, though Fleming



Who Knows Affects Who Goes: How Race and Income Influence Public Opinion on Montessori Education

David J. Fleming, Ph.D. (david.fleming@furman.edu)

BACKGROUND

Given the increase in the number of public Montessori programs across the United States, it is important to consider who participates in these programs. The history of Montessori in the United States is intertwined with questions of race and class (Debs, 2019). Despite evidence that Montessori schools have the potential to close racial and socio-economic achievement gaps (e.g., Brown & Lewis, 2017; Culclasure, et al., 2018; Lillard et al., 2017), students of color and disadvantaged students are often underrepresented in Montessori programs (Culclasure et al., 2018; Debs & Brown, 2017).

While there are many possible explanations for this phenomenon, two likely reasons are differential knowledge concerning Montessori education and differing preferences regarding school characteristics across various subgroups of parents. It is important to identify who says that they have knowledge of the Montessori model and how accurate their knowledge is. While past research in this area is limited, Murray's (2008, 2012) survey analysis is the leading work on this question. When it comes to parental preferences, previous researchers on this topic have surveyed or interviewed Montessori parents in an effort to understand why they chose Montessori (e.g., Debs, 2019; Hiles, 2018). However, these studies do not examine why some parents may not be interested in Montessori education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How knowledgeable are parents about Montessori education?
2. Do parents support the Montessori approach to education?
3. How does knowledge and support of Montessori education differ by subgroup?

RESEARCH METHODS

Data for this analysis come from a national survey of parents of children aged 0-17 years old. I contracted with Qualtrics to get access to their panel of respondents. The survey was in the field from late September to mid-October 2022. A quota sampling method was used to create the sample. The sample matches the demographics of American adults based on race/ethnicity, income, and education. While the sample is not nationally representative, it does reflect the population in important ways. In total, 750 parents participated in the survey. The survey instrument was created in consultation with Montessori experts. Some questions were taken from Murray (2008, 2012) in order to replicate the previous analyses.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Knowledge of Montessori: Parents were asked if they had heard of the term, “Montessori Education” and, if so, how knowledgeable they were about Montessori. **Approximately 46% of parents said that they were at least “slightly knowledgeable” about the Montessori approach to education.** These parents were then asked nine True/False questions about Montessori education. On average, parents answered 4.4 questions correctly. **Parents demonstrated low knowledge levels when it came to the existence of public Montessori schools.**

Support for Montessori: Parents who were at least “slightly knowledgeable” about Montessori education were asked how much they support the Montessori method. **Amongst these knowledgeable parents, approximately 58% of respondents supported the Montessori approach “a great deal” or “a lot.”** The 54% of the survey respondents who were not knowledgeable about Montessori received information about the method. They were then asked their level of support. **Amongst parents with less familiarity with Montessori, about 54% agreed with the approach to education after reading a description.**

Groups for Analysis: Using parents’ level of knowledge of Montessori and their support for Montessori, I categorized parents into four groups:

Supporters: These parents are at least slightly knowledgeable about Montessori, and they support it “a great deal” or “a lot.” → 27% of Parents

Receptive: These parents were unfamiliar with Montessori but strongly/ somewhat agreed with the approach after reading about it. → 29% of Parents

Unconvinced: These parents were unfamiliar with Montessori and did not agree with the Montessori approach after reading about it. → 20% of Parents

Skeptics: These parents are at least slightly knowledgeable about Montessori but supported it only a moderate amount or less. → 15% of Parents

DISCUSSION

This analysis found that not quite half of parents were familiar with Montessori education and had at least a minimum amount of knowledge about it. That is largely consistent with previous work, as Murray (2008) found 51% of the public had at least some knowledge of Montessori. When examining factual knowledge of Montessori, I found that parental knowledge is often lacking. For example, less than 30% of parents knew that Montessori education exists in public schools. Parents were generally in support of the Montessori approach, which explains why it has expanded in both the public and private sectors. One limitation to the growth of Montessori is that many parents were unaware of the approach. Once Montessori was described to these parents, most of them supported it.

Support for Montessori is not limited to one racial or socio-economic group. Rather, I found widespread support for the Montessori model. **Black parents were the least likely to have heard of Montessori but were the most likely to support the approach. High education and high-income parents had higher levels of knowledge and support of the Montessori model.** Those who want to expand Montessori should continue to try to educate the public on the approach, as many parents have misconceptions of Montessori. This analysis suggests that the reason that white and high-income students are overrepresented in some Montessori programs is not because the Montessori model does not appeal to other parents. Rather, diversity in these schools could be enhanced if more parents of color knew about Montessori and if other barriers these parents face were diminished.

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notes that “parents demonstrated low knowledge levels when it came to the existence of public Montessori schools.”

Fleming classified participants into four groups: supporters (knowledgeable and supportive), receptive (not knowledgeable but supportive), unconvinced (not knowledgeable and not supportive), and skeptics (knowledgeable but not supportive).

Respondents were also grouped by race, income level, and level of education. Generally speaking, high-income, high-education parents were most likely to be supportive of Montessori, while low-income, non-college-degree-holding parents were more likely to be unconvinced or skeptical. Among racial groups, Black parents were most likely to be supportive of or receptive to Montessori, with almost three-quarters reporting positive views of Montessori, though they were also the least likely to have heard of Montessori.

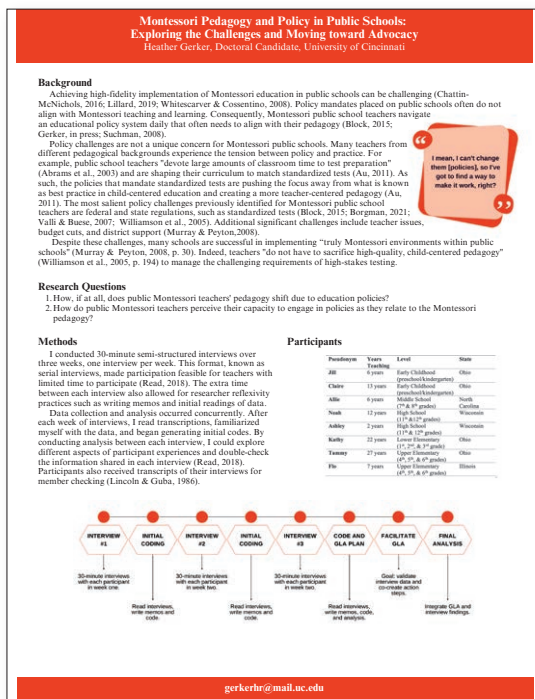
As the title of this poster suggests, Fleming argues that the demographic composition of public Montessori schools is related to “who knows” about Montessori: “This analysis suggests that the reason that white and high-income students are overrepresented in some Montessori programs is not because the Montessori model does not appeal to other parents. Rather, diversity in these schools could be enhanced if more parents of color knew about Montessori and if other barriers these parents face were diminished.” This indicates that public Montessori schools must be intentional in their outreach and recruitment efforts in order to create schools that are representative of the communities they serve.

What do teachers think about policy, and what can they do about it?

Doctoral candidate Heather Gerker interviewed public Montessori teachers to find out how, if at all, these teachers shift their pedagogy in response to education policy, and how they perceive their ability to respond to or influence policymakers (*Montessori Pedagogy and Policy in Public Schools: Exploring the Challenges and Moving toward Advocacy*).

Study participants included eight teachers, representing early childhood through high school, working in district Montessori programs across five different states. Participants were interviewed weekly for three weeks, a format that allowed both the participants and the researcher to reflect on themes emerging from these conversations. These themes included the idea that Montessori is

“more than the materials,” and is in fact a comprehensive pedagogical approach. They felt that as Montessori programs existing within the context of a public school district, they were sometimes treated as “a square peg in a round hole.” Lastly, they felt that their expertise as teachers was not always recog-



nized at the district level. Though state and federally mandated assessments are often named as key conflicts for public Montessori educators, the mandates that these educators wrestled with the most were district-specific.

These conversations coalesced around a set of recommendations for district leaders:

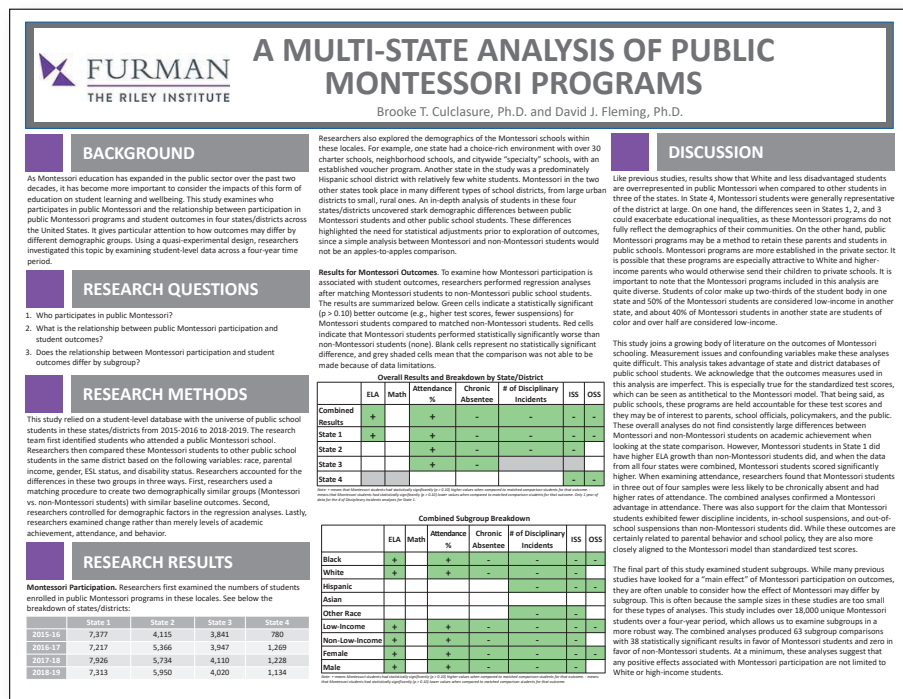
1. Listen to teachers—and act on their suggestions.
2. Create and solicit input from a district Montessori advocacy group.
3. Provide education about Montessori for all stakeholder groups in the community.
4. Create policies that are flexible enough to be implemented in a way that’s appropriate for each school.
5. Provide Montessori professional development for Montessori educators.

They also suggested that Montessori teacher education programs include advocacy and policy work as part of teacher preparation. As teachers are integral to the success of any Montessori school, public or private, districts hoping to launch or sustain a Montessori program should take heed of these insights to better support teachers and their work.

What do districts need to know?

The final study to be highlighted here, a joint venture between the National

Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (Dr. Katie Brown—the author) and Montessori Partnerships for Georgia (Dr. Ian Parker and Annie Frazer), also focused on Montessori in district contexts (*Public Montessori as a Reform Model: Questions and Considerations for School Districts*).



a Montessori program.

District leaders were also cognizant of the context and climate within their district at any given moment, and reported that they would need to think carefully about funding constraints, political capital, and how—or if—they could solicit buy-in from teachers.

Recognizing that district Montessori programs are a key lever for increasing access to Montessori, the researchers asked: *What questions would school district leaders need answered about a new curriculum, like Montessori, in order to consider its implementation?*

To answer this question, we interviewed 11 district-level leaders from eight different school districts across five regions of the United States. Five of these districts had an established Montessori program, one had a nascent Montessori program, and the other two had no Montessori program at all.

When asked what questions and concerns they would have about launching a new program like Montessori, school leaders responded with ideas across three general categories:

- their own understanding of the program
- the local sociopolitical context within which they work
- the nuts-and-bolts practicalities of what launching the program would mean.

Generally speaking, most district leaders had some experience with Montessori in their personal lives, often as a Montessori parent or grandparent, and had positive views of the pedagogy. However, they recognized that they would need more knowledge than this in order to effectively oversee

Interestingly, district leaders did not report any significant role for families in this decision-making process, though teachers’ views were influential.

Lastly, district leaders had very specific questions about concrete concerns like teacher training and recruitment; facilities; and lotteries, transportation, and access. Interestingly, these responses indicate that district leaders might be open to the types of suggestions identified by Heather Gerker in her study, at least at the outset of a new program. The authors conclude that the expansion of district Montessori programs could be supported and accelerated by outreach and education for district leaders, including an implementation road map to guide the start-up process.

It’s gratifying to see researchers turning their attention to key questions and problems of the public Montessori movement. Taken together, these studies highlight the promise and potential of public Montessori schools, as well as opportunities for continued growth.

Katie Brown is the Director of Research and Professional Learning for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

Opening and closing

New public programs



DAVID AYER

Even as schools across the country have contended with teacher shortages and the challenges of emerging from the pandemic, at least ten new public Montessori programs opened this year:

- **Denver Public Schools** (Denver, Colorado) added a new classroom of 15 three- and four-year-olds at College View Elementary in south-west Denver, in partnership with the Montessori Collective, covered on MontessoriPublic here: Montessori on the move in Denver.
- **Creekstone Montessori School**, a new K-6 charter school in Red Wing, Minnesota, opened its doors in September, serving 114 children with waiting lists at all levels. The school offers a fee-based preK with some financial assistance available.
- **Tulsa Public Schools** (Tulsa, Oklahoma) has added a third Montessori school at Eugene Field Elementary. The school opened with three- and four-year-olds and will expand through elementary at a grade per year.
- **Whitmore Lake Public Schools**, in Whitmore Lake, Michigan took over a struggling private program, Go Like the Wind Montessori, and is incorporating the school into the district. The program is tuition-supported for three- and four-year-olds, and has plans to expand through fifth grade.
- **Canutillo Independent School District** opened the first public Montessori program in the El Paso, Texas region at Gonzalo & Sofia Garcia Elementary School. The program opened with free, full-day, dual-language Montessori for students who will be three years old during the 2022-23 school year.

- **Hillsborough County Schools** in Tampa, Florida, opened a Montessori magnet program in September, offering three classrooms for three-to-six year-olds at Montessori Academy at Essrig Elementary School. NCMPS worked closely with the district to support the launch.
- **Lawrence Public Schools** in Lawrence, Kansas, has launched a new program at New York Elementary, starting with three classrooms of three- and four-year olds and expanding to Elementary in the fall.
- **Premont Independent School District** in Premont, Texas, launched a kindergarten class at the Premont Montessori Academy, a new program which will grow to a K-5 model over the next few years.
- **The Riverseed School**, the first campus of DC Wildflower Schools, a charter network in Washington, DC, opened its doors with three- and four-year olds, and plans to grow through 5th grade.
- **Lansing School District** in Lansing, Michigan consolidated its two existing Montessori programs into a single PK-8 program at Wexford Montessori Academy.

Sadly, we’ve seen a few schools close this year as well:

- **The Lagunitas School District Montessori Program** in San Geronimo, California, will be merged with an “Open Classroom” elementary program this fall. It’s not clear if the new program will be Montessori.
- **Penfield Montessori Academy**, an innovative charter in Milwaukee, Wisconsin serving children with special needs and sponsored by the Penfield Children’s Center, a long-standing program for children with developmental delays, looks to be closing its doors after a series of funding shortfalls.

The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector adds new schools to the Montessori Census, a national database of public and private Montessori schools. Schools can search for their listings, claim them, and update information if needed.

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

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MontessoriPublic is your voice as public Montessorians—quite literally. We share stories from classroom teachers, coaches, school leaders, families, researchers, and more, all reporting from their perspectives in the public Montessori world.

So for the fall, we want to hear what's going well in public Montessori. What are the outcomes and achievements you care about, and how are you reaching them? Drop us a line.

If you're thinking about an article, here are some general guidelines:

How long should it be? Most of the articles in this issue are between 1500 and 2000 words, so you can see how that looks on the page, and how much room you have to tell your story.

What's the deadline? The final deadline for the Fall 2023 issue is **August 31, 2023**, but we would love to get started working with you now—that gives us plenty of time to get your piece just right.

What about pictures and a short biography? Every article looks better with a nice, high resolution photo helping to tell the story. We also need a high resolution “headshot” for the author images. “High resolution” usually means a file size of 1MB+. Add a short, one-line biography and we're all set.



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

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

The public calendar

June 20-23

Baltimore Montessori Conference
BALTIMORE, MD

June 22-25

Montessori for Social Justice
Summer Conference
IMAGINING LIBERATION—HONORING OUR HUMANITY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

August 2-5

The 29th International
Montessori Congress
BANGKOK, THAILAND

September 30

Montessori Public Policy Initiative
2023 MPPI ADVOCACY CONFERENCE
POTOMAC, MARYLAND

October 6-7

Montessori Association of North
Carolina Annual Conference
MONTESSORI FOR ALL
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

November 2-5

The Montessori Foundation/
International Montessori Council
THE 27TH MF/IMC CONFERENCE
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

November 10-12

Wisconsin Montessori Association
Annual Conference
BUILDING INDEPENDENCE
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

February 16-19

The Montessori Experience
AMI REFRESHER COURSE AND WORKSHOPS
DALLAS, TEXAS

March 7-10

The Montessori Event
AMS ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

April 11-14

NCMPS Public Montessori Conference
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Deadline for the next issue: **August 31, 2023**.
Be sure to include the date, organization, event title, city and state
Email to: editor@montessoripublic.org

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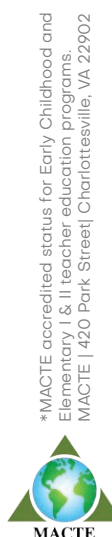
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