

MONTESSORI insights

The Magazine of the Montessori Australia Foundation – 2009

The Child
in Nature



In this Issue

Montessori Insights is a regular magazine especially for Montessori parents. Our aim is to provide interesting, thought-provoking and relevant articles about Montessori education and philosophy.

The Child in Nature

This edition has an emphasis on **The Child in Nature**. The contributions starts with 'The Child's Innate Love for Nature' and the importance for the young child in building a strong connection to nature. In a new feature we explain some of the Montessori materials and activities - focusing in this issue on the 'Leaf Cabinet' and the 'Outdoor Environment'. Moving on to the Montessori Primary environment children gain a profound and practical understanding of environmental sustainability. Montessori is recognised as being at the forefront of sustainability and we see this reflected in award winning Montessori schools across Australia. It takes time to enjoy and appreciate nature and this is reflected in two articles - one a diary of a grandparent highlights the very special opportunities grandparents have to allow the child to explore at his own pace and simple things that can be done to foster the child's independence. 'Allowing time for your child to develop' is one of the greatest gifts you can give them. Rounding off this issue several new books are reviewed along with website, blogs and other resources parents may find useful.

Contents

- The Child's Innate Love for Nature
- Montessori Explained - The Outdoor Environment
- Montessori Explained - The Leaf Cabinet
- Sustainability and Montessori
- Environmental Education for Sustainability
- Diary of a Montessori Grandparent
- Chemical Free Kids
- New Montessori Books
- Websites, Blogs and Resources for Montessori Parents
- Allowing Time for Your Child's Development

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The Child's Innate Love for Nature



The following talk was presented by Maria Teresa Vidales at the 2009 National Montessori Conference on 'The Child in Nature'.

When we think of nature many images come to mind; woods, rainforests, flowers, frogs, snakes, birds, rain, snow, sand, lakes, oceans and deserts among many others. Nature comes in many forms and it is a very important part of each of us.

Nature helps us to keep ourselves in balance, it is part of our spiritual development. It helps us to keep our capacity of wonder alive and makes us feel a part of the whole. It is up to us to remain reverent and keep this sense of awe and wonder in the face of the miracle of life. Nature makes us feel alive. Nature offers us a larger world of experiences, it inspires our creativity and allows us to use all our senses.

We need to become aware of the importance of nature in



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our own lives and be able to share this wonderful world, full of miracles, with our children.

This needs to be done from the very beginning of life. As we all know the first three years of life is an important and delicate period in the life of the human being. It is a period of construction, acquisition of skills and knowledge. A period of developing the potentialities that the child is born with. Maria Montessori calls it the period of the 'psychic embryo' or 'spiritual embryo'.

"Man seems to have two embryonic periods, one that is prenatal, like that of the animals. The other is postnatal and only man has this." (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 55)

This external gestation is the one that will allow the child, within many other things, to adapt to the environment and become a part of it. This environment we are talking about includes nature and what we often call the 'outdoor environment'. It is an environment that needs to be prepared as carefully as any other part of the child's environment.

The adult needs to open the door of nature, little by little, for the child in such a way that he can get from it what ever he needs. This is a precious period of self construction so it is important to give the child the materials, experiences, opportunity and time to build him or herself.

Remember the child needs to interact with nature and make it a part of himself and also to become part of nature. It is during the period of the first three years of life that an important aspect of the human being is formed. We cannot see this process with

our eyes but it is here where everything is laid out for the future development of the human being, where all the patterns for future behaviour are established through the child's interaction with his environment. It is our responsibility to be aware of the importance the prepared environment plays in the process of the child's self construction.

A very important part of this environment is nature, yet most of the time we forget about it. Nature will give the child the possibility to develop a sense of belonging, not just to his specific surroundings but to the cosmos itself. We need to prepare the environment in such a way that from the very beginning of his life the child can relate to nature.

Think about the natural movement of the leaves of the trees as a mobile that will help the child to develop his vision. Think about the music that is in nature; the songs of the birds, the sound of dried leaves underfoot when we walk or the rain when it falls. The sounds of nature will stimulate the child's sense of hearing. Close your eyes and recall the smell of the soil after the rain, the perfume of a rose when it starts to open or the fragrance of basil when you cut a leaf. What a wonderful way to stimulate the sense of smell.

Can you recall the experience of walking bare foot in the sand or touching the bark of the old tree, lying on the grass while wearing few clothes. The sense of touch is being stimulated with all these experiences. What about the taste of salt when you are near the ocean, the sweetness of the ripe berry or the tartness of a lemon? Do you remember the last time you chewed a sprig of fresh mint and how the flavour spread in your mouth?

All of these are gifts that nature gives to us and that we take for granted. Because we take these experiences for granted, we are not aware of the importance of introducing this wonderful part of our world to our children.

All these experiences need to be a part of the prepared environment for the young child. The child under three needs to have the opportunity to start his life with a strong connection to nature, to become part of it, to belong to it.

The adult is a role model for the children. We need to ask ourselves what can we do to prepare the right environment for the child?

The first things that we need to ask ourselves are:

- What is our relationship with nature?
- Do I still have the capacity to take the time to admire it?
- Do I still have that reverence when faced with the miracle of a new flower?
- Do I still enjoy going into nature or is it just a way of killing some time with my child?
- Are my capacities of wonder and astonishment still alive?

For the child to be able to relate with nature fully, we need to allow ourselves to do it and share our love for nature with the child.

We need to think about the different activities we can prepare for the child. We need to allow the child to take care of the outdoor environment keeping in mind his capacity to move. For example, picking up dry leaves or pinecones, watering the plants, sweeping and shovelling the snow off the walkway.

We know the importance for the child to develop his voluntary movement like crawling, walking, rolling, jumping, pushing, pulling or riding a cart. Throwing a ball, climbing a tree, walking on a balance beam, swinging in a leather swing, these and many more activities can be done in the outside environment.

We need to help the child to develop his senses through interaction with nature, by not being afraid of it and providing the possibility to go out even if it is raining or snowing. Remember it is not about 'bad weather' but 'inappropriate clothing'.

Give the child the possibility of playing with sand, exploring with water, washing their feet after a walk. Watching trees and their different coloured, shaped and textured leaves, tasting different fruits, smelling flowers with different aromas, exploring herbs with different tastes and smells. By providing bird feeders we can attract birds to watch and listen to them singing. The biggest obstacle for the child is our lack of capacity to enjoy nature.

It is also important to allow the child to experience taking care of nature. Taking care of a vegetable garden that later he will be able to enjoy; discovering the vegetables in the plants, picking them up and eating them.

Through observation and with the help of the absorbent mind

“ The child under three needs to have the opportunity to start his life with a strong connection to nature, to become part of it, to belong to it. ”





the child will discover and absorb the scientific principles hidden in nature. The metamorphosis of a frog or caterpillar to butterfly; the use of a magnifying glass to observe some tiny insects; a bird's nest.

So we need to prepare the environment in such a way that the child is able to experience beauty in nature, which is 'The Masterpiece of Art'.

Provide chairs to sit outside, provide the opportunity to lie down and observe the movements of the clouds.

If we want a better world for our children, we need to give them the best opportunities to develop a strong relationship with nature. Let us take the hand of the children and allow them to guide us on the path of rediscovering nature, on this journey of rediscovering the world through their eyes.

Keep in mind that with each child new hope and promise are born and fulfilling these hopes and promises is our challenge.

Maria Teresa Vidales



The Outdoor Environment

The outdoor area is an extension of the inside space as well as being a space in its own right. It often includes a garden where the children can grow and harvest flowers, herbs, fruits and vegetables. Plants which reflect a variety of flowers, leaf shapes, smells and colours should be available to the child outside.

The activities and materials offered outside have just as much thought and care put into them as those offered inside. There are opportunities for purposeful movement, order, communication and independence. There are opportunities to practice and apply skills of care of self, care of others and care of the environment. Some activities your 3 to 6 child may do outside include: cloth washing, window washing, sweeping, raking, planting and harvesting and watering plants. Different art activities may also be offered outside such as: painting on an easel, clay and construction work.

The needs of the child and the child's plane of development are considered when planning different outdoor activities. For example, spaces to practice jumping, hopping, skipping, balancing, digging, ball skills... Is this a child who needs opportunities to be a member of a team and enjoys challenging themselves and discovering how far to push their body? Opportunities for team games, places to climb, hang and swing may be offered. The outdoors is not just a place to use large muscles and be energetic, there are also places for children to be by themselves, quiet places for conversations or contemplation, for sitting, lying, and observing.

The outdoor environment can also include a covered area where children can take their tables, chairs and floor mats to work on. Materials which are often thought of as 'inside activities' can be taken outside. For example the 3 to 6 child may work with sorting, matching and grading colours (colour tables), textures (touch boards and tablets, fabrics), dimension (pink tower, brown stair, red rods). The child may take language or math activities outside to do. Memory games, language games and finding things in the environment games can all be played outside.

"There is freedom in the environment. There is discipline which arises out of the environment. There is joy which is the sign of every healthy growth. The conditions provide for mutual understanding, co-operation and helpfulness which are the roots of morality and character." (*What You Should Know About Your Child*).

The children experience nature and the natural world. To learn about environmental issues and sustainability the children need to do more than talk about saving our planet. They need to go outside and explore the beauty and richness of the earth: to see with their own eyes, experience with their senses and contribute actively.

For the second plane child (6 to 12 years) the outdoor environment extends learning past the four walls of the classroom, past the school grounds and into the wider community.





“When the child goes out, it is the world itself that offers itself to him. Let us take the child out to show him real things instead of making objects which represent ideas and closing them in cupboards... Reality is studied in detail, then the whole is imagined. The detail is able to grow in the imagination, and so total knowledge is attained. (From *Childhood to Adolescence*)”



Montessori explained...



The Leaf (or Botany) Cabinet

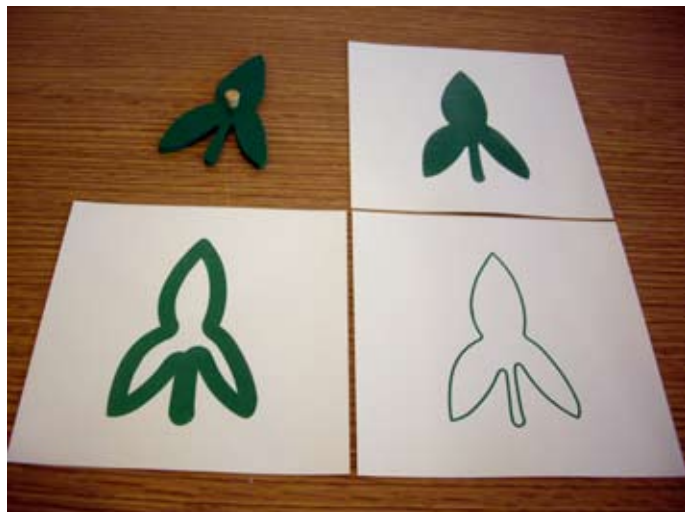
Have you noticed the young child is drawn to the tiny ant, that the child's attention is caught by the delicate new bud or shoot just starting to emerge? The child has a close connection to nature and in the 3 to 6 Montessori classroom this interest is further stimulated through the leaf cabinet. This is a cabinet containing different leaf shapes. Three sets of cards (one with a filled in leaf shape, one with a thick outline and one with a thin outline) are also used with the shapes from the cabinet.

The child experiences the different leaf shapes by tracing around the inset and then the frame with a stick. This allows the child to follow the outline of the leaf shape and also indirectly prepares the child for holding a pencil for later writing. Matching to the cards gradually leads the child to a more abstract representation of the shape.

The work with the cabinet begins around the age of four but as always the knowledge, skills and interests of the individual child are taken into account when deciding the appropriate time to introduce this material. The child's interest and work in the area of botany is sparked with this material and encourages the child to do their own exploration and discovery.

The child extends this work by comparing and matching the leaf shapes with plants within the inside or outside environment. The leaf shape can be held next to the leaf on the plant or by collecting leaves that have fallen to the ground and bringing them back to the cabinet.

The interest of the child is also extended through access to resource books: information books, fact and fiction, stories, songs and poems. Language cards, labels, artwork, science experiments, discovering where plants come from, experiencing the life cycle of a plant from seed to harvest... We can see the child can take many different paths. We need to offer the world to our children and take time to see the natural world in a new fresh way through the eyes of our children. Stop to smell the flowers. Take time to marvel at the wonders of nature, the colours, shapes, smells, sounds and textures.





Sustainability and Montessori

The concept of sustainability ties in beautifully with the Montessori idea of cosmic education. Sustainability involves using resources responsibly to meet human needs while being mindful of and preserving the environment for now as well as into the future.

This is increasingly being acknowledged by the wider community. The Graduate School of the Environment, Macquarie University states:

"A century ago, a scientist named Dottoressa Maria Montessori discovered Education for Sustainable Development. She said, however, that she did not invent it. "The child showed it to me!" Maria Montessori realised that within the child is a secret teacher that helps him construct himself to be self-sustainable from infancy (0-6 years old), childhood (6-12), adolescence (12-18), up to adulthood (18-24). So, what Dr Montessori discovered is now reiterated by UNESCO as the four Pillars of Education: (I) Learning to be; (II) Learning to learn; (III) Learning to work; and (IV) Learning to live together harmoniously. UNESCO may have identified WHAT Education for Sustainable Development is, but Dottoressa Maria Montessori's system showed HOW to work it out.... Dr Montessori provided the scientific formula for an alternative teacher-training program with a very innovative curriculum and its corresponding set of learning apparatus. This is what the children, specially of developing countries, need – the vehicle to develop his full human potential. Whenever this system is properly used, the result of an economically self-sufficient citizen could be replicated throughout the 21st century:"
<http://www.gse.mq.edu.au/news/project.htm>

Montessori schools promote sustainability as an integral part of their curriculum, school and wider community. Montessori schools and teachers are leading the way forward in sustainability and some examples from around the country include Neil Van Herk from Beehive Montessori School in WA, the recipient of the

Teach Sustainability Award for 2008: sustainability through organic farming: year 7-8 science/cross curricula resource.
<http://www.teachsustainability.com.au/resources/sustainability-through-organic-gardening/view>

Water and Waste Management

Beehive Montessori School was also a winner in the 2008 Sustainable living challenge with their water and waste management project.
<http://www.sustainableliving.com.au/inspiration/past-projects-archive/Summary%20of%20Champions%20projects%202008.pdf>

Canberra Montessori School in the ACT have received accreditation for their water wise activities. Canberra Montessori also received a high commendation in the 2007 ACT Sustainable schools awards.

Solar Panels

Chrysalis Montessori Primary School in Glendalough, WA is coordinating a project on the Science of Sustainability (Beehive Montessori is also participating in this project).
<http://project.asistm.edu.au/special/successful.asp?r=9&state=WA>

In addition to this they have installed solar panels, find out how they are a 'shining example of how a small school on a small budget can achieve outstanding results in sustainable energy' on the following link:
http://www.sciencewa.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=877:a-guiding-light-to-sustainability&catid=186&Itemid=200072



Forestville Montessori School, NSW also have a schools solar panel program and won \$5000 second prize in the Sydney Morning Herald Earth Hour competition in 2008.
<http://www.warringah.nsw.gov.au/econews/spring08.aspx#schoolspotlight>

Gardens

Montessori East in Bondi, NSW received a \$4000 grant from the Waverley Council this year towards their "Eco-refuge" transforming their synthetic grass playground into a natural area with edible gardens.
<http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/council/enviro/sustainable/SustainableSchoolsProgram.asp#Achievements>

Bacchus March Montessori Centre in Victoria received funding for an indigenous and vegetable garden.

Combining Fundraising with Raising Community Awareness

Beechworth Montessori in Victoria is promoting the sustainable house tours again this year as part of their major fundraising event. This showcases sustainable houses within a 20km radius of Beechworth and is an opportunity to learn something about sustainable house design as well as having a closer look at very inspiring houses.
<http://housetour:beechworthmontessori.vic.edu.au>

Hills Montessori School, South Australia has a commitment to educating students and the wider school community in the preservation of the environment and working as a community to encourage practices that will enhance and sustain our environment for the future.
<http://www.montessori.sa.edu.au/about/garden-expo>
<http://www.uraidlar7.sa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=25>

The Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI)

This is a National initiative that aims at dramatically reducing water use, greenhouse emissions and solid waste output. For more

information on how to become an AuSSI school visit:
<http://www.environment.gov.au/education/aussi/how.html>
 Each State and Territory has it's own links and a number of Montessori schools are featured under different projects.

In Victoria, Gisborne Montessori School is widely featured under the following school sustainability projects: energy, water, biodiversity and community. Gisborne Montessori School was also a finalist in the Australia wide Sustainable School Champion Award run by the Faculty of the Built Environment, University of NSW in 2003 and 2004.
http://sustainability.ceres.org.au/pdfs/school%20projects/Gisborne_Montessori_School.pdf

Blue Gum Montessori in Bibra Lake, Western Australia is listed on the AuSSI WA site.
<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/sustainableschools/detcms/navigation/action-learning-areas/economics/blue-gum-montessori/?page=2&tab=Main>

Congratulations to all these schools for their ongoing commitment to the environment and sustainability. We also congratulate and acknowledge the many other schools not listed, who are also contributing and have been successful in attracting funding with different projects.

Montessori education is truly education for life.

"Let us give the child a vision of the whole universe... for all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity." (*To Educate the Human Potential*)





Environmental Education for Sustainability

The Hills Montessori School is situated in an idyllic bushland location in Aldgate in the Adelaide Hills and has been operating for 31 years. In 1989 the current school property was purchased from the Field Naturalist Society and at the time of purchase a verbal agreement and commitment was made to maintain parts of our bush environment and to build the school in harmony with the bush setting. From those very early beginnings a founding value of the school has been to show a deep respect for our environment and instil that respect and love for the environment in our students.

Over the years dedicated staff and parents have worked hard to maintain and improve the school's native vegetation, spending time and resources and identifying our environment as a high priority. A very strong, clear, positive message to our students about the significance of our environment has been continually sent from the School Board, parents and staff who have placed a high importance on the development and management of our school grounds from its inception. An active bush care group over the years has taught both students and adults alike the importance of, and delight and wonder of interacting with the environment.

Dr Maria Montessori stated that,
 "There must be provision for the child to have contact with Nature; to understand and appreciate the order, the harmony, and the beauty in Nature...so that the child may better understand and participate in the marvellous things which civilization creates..."

It is vital that Environmental Education for Sustainability is a whole school approach that becomes embedded in the Vision, Values, Strategic Plan and curriculum of the school.

The Hills Montessori School community has demonstrated their commitment to the environment over the years by revegetating

areas of native bush land on the school property. Staff and students have worked with a local community group to plant native trees and manage the weeds in a neighbouring local park. A weed management program has reduced the weeds and noxious or introduced plant species on the school property. For many years the school has worked with Trees for Life nurturing seedlings and revegetating areas with native plants both on the school property and private properties of school families.

Throughout the school's life, successful grant applications have enabled us to establish trails through the bush, develop and implement Vegetation Management Action Plans, tap into expertise and formulate extensive lists of all plant species on the property and install bird, bat and possum boxes to encourage native wildlife to live and nest on the property. This has all greatly contributed to the delight and enhancement of our students' learning. Recent successful water and solar energy grants have provided sustainable solutions within the school. All of these endeavours have modelled and demonstrated very practical action that can be taken but most importantly has promoted stewardship of the environment, encouraging students and their families to assume the responsibility of being a caretaker or custodian for the environment.

Dr Maria Montessori knew the importance of teaching the child an appreciation for nature to improve human and environmental well-being. She affirmed this in her writing..."The land is where our roots are. The children must be taught to feel and live in harmony with the Earth."

Environmental awareness and environmental education for sustainability has a high profile within our school's curriculum and

is a core feature of the school ethos. The school has developed strong ties with the local Natural Resource Management (NRM) Board and in particular the education officers who have worked closely with staff and students on numerous projects within the school and have provided a variety of professional development sessions for staff. For many years we have been classified as an "Environmental Focus School" and regarded as a model of good practice for environmental education.

In 1994 the Cycle 3 students began volunteering their services working in collaboration with the Natural Resource Management Catchment group as part of the Water Watch program. Water watch is a water quality monitoring and catchment education program that provides opportunities for students to make a difference to their local creeks, rivers and dams. Cycle 2 students



and staff continue to be a part of this program today viewing it as a valuable teaching tool and a practical way of assisting the local community and monitoring the sustainability and health of our local waterways.

Similarly, for the past ten years Cycle 2 students and staff have worked with the local region NRM and been involved with the Gutter Guardians program. The Gutter Guardians Program is another valuable education program that helps to raise student and community awareness of the impacts of organic street waste and the importance of storm water pollution prevention. Students sweep local gutters, collect, sort and calculate the type

and amount of storm water pollutants entering our local storm water systems. The program raises awareness amongst students and the community about water pollution problems and is but one way students can make a difference in their local community. In 2008 Cycle 3 students formed a Sustainability Group and joined with eight other hills primary schools to be a part of the Hills Schools Sustainability Forum. The student led group have undertaken various environmental projects over the past two years. A more effective recycling program has been established in the school with colour coded recycling bins for refundable and recyclable items.

KESAB Environmental Solutions organisation visited the school and alongside students, a waste audit was conducted highlighting the need for awareness to be raised. Consequently the student sustainability group presented sessions to all classes to educate them in the importance of reducing packaging and providing 'waste-free' lunches. All classes have established worm farms fed by food scraps from lunches. The worms decompose organic matter to produce worm castings, which are used for watering pot plants and providing gardens with extra nutrients. The Sustainability Group have also bottled the worm juice to sell to the school community.

A frog pond is being developed in the school in response to concern about the decline in frog populations due to climate change. Students have learnt that thirty per cent of frog species in the Adelaide Hills are under extreme threat.

Recently the Sustainability Group organised a "Green Up Clean Up" week encouraging all students to become involved in, and raise awareness about 'green practices'. The students in the Sustainability Group volunteer their time to all of these projects and also provide education sessions to younger students in the school and have presented their projects at various student environmental forums held at other schools over the past two years.

In 2009 the school was successful in obtaining a Commonwealth Government Values Grant which enabled the Cycle 3 staff to implement a Service Learning program which has proven to be highly effective and popular amongst senior students. One of three areas of service students could nominate to be involved in was working with the environment. Students worked both within the school and in the wider community supported by adult mentors who championed and encouraged the student initiated projects. These authentic learning situations provided ideal opportunities for students to make a positive contribution to both the school and broader community. Students demonstrated a sense of pride, achievement and fulfilment after each stage of the Service Learning program.

Observations have revealed attitude changes amongst students, and some students are now confident and feel empowered by the skills they developed as a direct result of this program. It is programs such as these that develop the kinds of civic values and skills that enable students to be leaders in the transition to a sustainable future. Greater moral and social awareness has been enhanced in students through their participation in community service projects. Students have been challenged to make decisions that have observable consequences, think creatively and work cooperatively as a team. All of these are skills students need to be armed with when assuming responsibility for creating a sustainable future. Couple this learning with Montessori's Cosmic Education and students begin to understand the interdependence

and complexity of the world in which they live. It is vital that our students develop the knowledge, critical thinking skills, values and capacity to participate in decision making about environmental and sustainable issues.

Montessori's words on education and peace can undoubtedly be transferred to the environmental global issues we currently face today. Dr Montessori declared, "An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live." (Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace*)

Effective environmental education for sustainability is not just a curriculum issue, it requires the involvement of the whole school. It encompasses all aspects of the school operations, curriculum, teaching and learning, physical surroundings and relationships with the local community. In 2007 The Hills Montessori School fundraising committee launched the Hills Garden & Environmental Expo which has become an annual community event in the Adelaide Hills. Over 2500 people visited the event in 2008. In 2007 and 2008 sponsorship was provided by the Natural Resource Management Board and many well known gardening and environmental identities have publicly advocated their support and involvement in the event.

The Expo provides the wider community with sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions via a wide variety of exhibitors and an interesting mix of presenters and demonstrators. The School has a commitment to educating students and the wider community in the preservation of the environment and working as a community to encourage practices that will enhance and sustain our environment for the future. This commitment has been the driving principle behind the creation of this event in addition to it being the signature fundraising event each year. It also reflects



the School's willingness to 'put something back' and engage more deeply with the community.

Over 100 volunteers from the school work collaboratively each year to stage this event building community spirit both within the school and broader community. The event has been supported by many well known conservationists and environmentalists with Dr Mike Bossley, a lifelong campaigner and educator for environmental conservation and 2005 South Australian of the year, presenting the inaugural Sustainability Prize at the event in 2008. In 2007 and 2008 the Hills Garden & Environmental Expo was nominated for an 'SA Great Tourism Award'.

The key elements of education for sustainability complement the Montessori philosophy and methodology in every respect. Education for sustainability espouses the importance of developing an ethic of personal responsibility and developing attitudes and skills to enable students to participate as active and involved citizens in building a sustainable future.

Montessori schools provide the ideal environment to work with the youth of today to ensure longevity of our planet. It is critical as educators that we keep in mind that a sustainable future cannot be created without considering and involving young people. Ultimately we need to empower our children to make considered decisions, inspire them to take action and prepare and equip them with the skills and values to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future. As Dr Maria Montessori so adeptly and accurately prophesised, 'The child is both hope and a promise for mankind.' (Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace*)

Cathy France, Principal, Hills Montessori School



Diary of a Montessori Grandparent

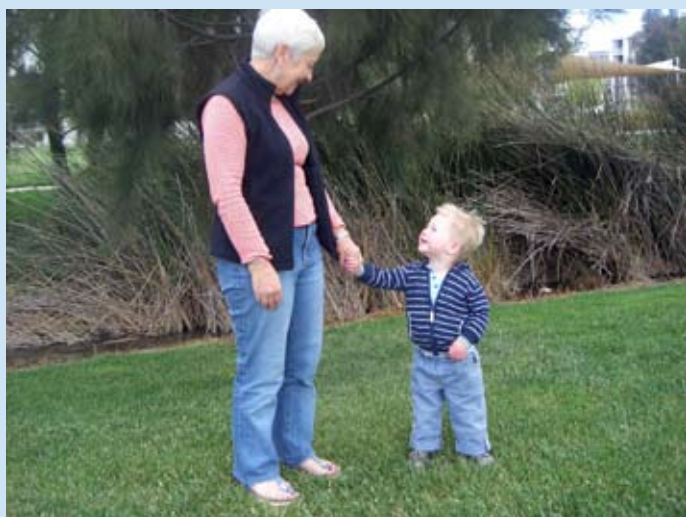
My grandson, Jonah, is now 2 years old and has been attending a Montessori Parent Toddler Program since he was 18 months old. His mum (my daughter) is now 26 and she attended a Montessori Cycle 1 classroom for 3 years (there was no primary school available then). My memories of parenting at that time are blurred. I felt that I was always too busy trying to work part-time and be a good Montessori parent, rushing from one thing to another; an inevitable Montessori meeting or just shopping and household chores. Both sets of grandparents lived outside of Canberra and I always felt that there was something missing in our daughter's daily life not having that contact. So you can imagine the joy when I became a significant part of my grandson's life (although I have always tried to take a back step when it comes to advice about parenting and Montessori). That journey has to be taken by my daughter and her partner!

I am fortunate enough to spend a day or two with Jonah while his mum works. It is an absolute joy and has actually changed my attitude to life. The day usually starts fairly early and we have a relaxed breakfast and sometimes a walk to feed the horses near where I live. We choose a carrot or apple and take our time getting there often stopping to explore interesting sticks, stones, insects and flowers. This was a little frustrating for me at first. After all, our goal was to get to the horses wasn't it? Well, I realized this wasn't Jonah's. The process of getting there was just as important and some days we don't actually make it. We pick up clumps of dried grass and pretend to be scarecrows, sing or play hide and seek. It has really slowed me down and forced me to be "in the moment" not to mention Jonah's pleasure at spending time with an adult who doesn't appear to be in any particular hurry to get anywhere.

From very early on my husband and I decided that we didn't want to turn our house into a full-blown Montessori environment, having just renovated and refurnished the house after our daughter left home. However, we still feel strongly that when Jonah is around he should have a reasonable amount of freedom to move around safely and maintain and encourage his growing independence and self-responsibility. We live in a town house with 3 flights of stairs so from a very early age we encouraged Jonah to safely navigate his way up and down stairs and we always counted each step. Now when he climbs the stairs it's as if his counting switch is turned on. He's had a few falls but this has only honed his skills.

Naturally at this age one of Jonah's favourite places in our house is the kitchen. We have a walk-in pantry and I rearranged the lower shelves so that Jonah can have free access to food and healthy snacks throughout the day although sometimes we need to negotiate about lunch being something other than sultanas, baked beans and fruit bars. Occasionally I will put these on a higher shelf and we add these items to our shopping list, which is another pleasurable activity mainly because I have time and we use it for lots of language activities.

Jonah's greatest companion in the kitchen is his set of steps, which are also kept in the pantry. His first words when we open the door are always "steps Nan, steps Nan", said with a real sense of urgency and a pointed finger and this requires my immediate action or else I get pulled into the pantry.



The steps are Jonah's means of access to the world of kitchen activities – chopping, mixing, cooking, washing up, wiping surfaces and generally feeling part of the adult world. He loves these practical life activities more than anything else we do and our day together almost always includes a cooking or food preparation activity. In fact, I think he would keep chopping and peeling bananas forever if I let him but there's only so much chopped banana you can eat or use in a banana loaf. It was Jonah's Uncle Dan (a fireman incidentally) who taught him how to chop safely when they were chopping carrots together to make soup and this has been reinforced at the Parent Toddler Programme. He seems to really enjoy putting peel in the compost section of my garbage drawer and we talk about recycling his baked beans tin or yoghurt pot. Occasionally we'll take the compost out to the compost bin in the garden. Unstacking the dishwasher has resulted in a few minor breakages but we clean up together and keep going.

When he was very young I decided to take the frustration out of our life by fitting "no go" cupboards and drawers with child proof locks and having one cupboard and a lower drawer with items he could pull out and use. I have a large glass trolley, which used to hold a few coffee table type books and sometimes a vase of flowers. It's now Jonah's trolley and in this way I feel I'm meeting his needs to have a choice of activities and access to drinking water while maintaining my need for a house that doesn't look like a preschool. Our large square ottoman doubles as Jonah's worktable as it's just the right height for him and I cover it with a cloth or plastic if we're painting or using play dough.

We always set the table for eating and have a small vase of flowers, which we pick from the garden when we can. We sit and talk about the food or the birds which we can see landing on the bird feeder outside the window. The birdseed is accessible to Jonah in the pantry but the feeder is too high for him to reach, as we have to keep it out of the reach of possums. He seems happy to give me a cup of seed to put in the feeder however. Until my cat died recently, Jonah could feed him at any time from a container with a small amount of biscuits that I refilled prior to his visit. This was a source of great delight for Jonah (and the cat as he didn't usually get fed during the day). Sometimes I would find Jonah adding biscuits to the cat's water bowl instead and the cat looking on patiently waiting for his treat.

One other activity I couldn't do without is a box of paper, pencils and scissors near the computer and phone so that if I need to be on the phone and/or computer I can immediately access the box and sit next to Jonah while I take the call. We have two office type chairs near the computer and he pushes his one next to mine and is usually content to sit for a while.

I don't think I could do this everyday and have the same positive attitude but I believe this is one of the benefits of being a grandparent. If you are lucky enough to be able to have the opportunity to share your grandchild's life and assist in their path to independence and self-responsibility, I highly recommend it. My only problem now is that I'm not sure I'll be ready to let history repeat itself and let go once he turns three and starts at his Montessori school.

Christine Harrison



Chemical Free Kids

Book Review—Dr Sarah Lantz protecting kids from toxic chemicals:

Mother and public health researcher at the University of Queensland, Dr Sarah Lantz says she has grave concerns about everyday chemicals we find on our supermarket shelves and around the house and how they could be affecting our children.



As a baby and toddler, Myla Adams was an international star, playing the lead role in over forty television commercials and countless magazines and promotional materials. Most were for popular personal care products and processed foods aimed at babies and toddlers: she sat in a bubble bath and giggled while her golden locks of hair were washed with no-more-tears baby shampoo; her bottom was wiped with fragranced nappy wipes; gums smeared with prescription numbing gel for painful teething; and she promoted three different sugared cereals. These cereal commercials were played in six different languages across the world. During her pre-teen years, Myla walked through an orange orchard for a company promoting flavoured cordial saying, 'It's like drinking orange juice, only better.' But what made her a real childhood star was her lead role in five different advertisements for a popular body spray aimed at teenage girls. These advertisements, with the promise of giving teenage girls instant friendships and lifelong happiness, were the catalyst which propelled the company to number one status in the body spray market. It was also this body spray that was the catalyst for the demise of Myla's health.

At the age of 14, Myla was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. She now experiences severe chemical sensitivities to everyday products, particularly products containing fragrances and perfumes. She explains:

"I don't know exactly when it started, but I guess I just gradually started feeling more and more tired and run down. I remember when I was about twelve; I could smell things that other kids couldn't. Like after swimming in the girls' change rooms, everyone would spray deodorant around, particularly at me because I did the ad for it, and they would sing and dance around. But while everyone else would be oblivious to it, all that spray would make me really nauseous and dizzy.

Other times I would just walk past someone and their perfume would make me sick. I can't handle being around glues and paints and some rooms that have those deodorizers in them really smell bad to me. New cars do as well. When it's bad I get headaches and aches and pains like I have the flu all the time. Mostly, though, I feel tired and I have no energy. Like getting up to make toast or something is enough to make me want to go to bed."

Myla can no longer use everyday washing detergents, shampoos, moisturisers, or perfumed products, like the ones she so proudly advertised a few years earlier. She is also sensitive to many

foods, and her symptoms get better or worse, depending on what she eats and drinks, who she is spending time with, and where she is living.

There's over a thousand new chemicals being introduced into the environment annually. This increase has been found to have a direct correlation with an increase in health problems affecting our population, especially, our children.

In recent years, asthma mortality, type II diabetes, development and reproductive disorders, and diet-related cancers have more than doubled; leukemia and brain cancer have increased in incidence; and learning disabilities and behavioural problems as well as obesity have become more widespread.

Dr Lantz has just released a book on the topic: *Chemical Free Kids – Raising Healthy Children in a Toxic World*. 'Chemical Free Kids' reveals how toxic chemicals in the environment play a critical role in our children's everyday health and wellbeing. It tells the inside truths on food additives; personal care products; over the counter and prescription drugs; household cleaning products and much more! Dr Sarah Lantz brings together her compelling research that includes interviews with Australian families with kids who have been affected by a range of toxic chemicals. She also brings clear new insights into a world of toxicity and related diseases caused by industrial and environmental chemicals that have gone relatively unnoticed and unspoken of since the industrial revolution.

In a practical sense 'Chemical Free Kids' teaches how to read labels and identify toxic and harmful ingredients leaving parents more empowered in asking the right questions about what is going into their kids bodies. This fabulous, one of a kind resource firmly supports parents, teachers, carers and health practitioners in tackling the issue of toxic chemicals and their impact on the health and wellbeing of children youths and adults.

- Learn how to create a toxic free home and lifestyle!
- What's really in your cupboards and on your dinner table?
- Learn what is in baby and personal care products!
- How do chemicals effect conception and pregnancy?
- Medicating kids, what are the safer more natural alternatives?
- What is the difference between 'Natural' and 'Synthetic' chemicals?
- What chemicals and other ingredients are in childhood vaccinations?
- Why Organic foods and farming is safer and healthier for everyone?

Other topics in 'Chemical Free Kids' include ADHD, early childhood and parenting as well as a comprehensive approach for living in wellness.

You can find further information at www.chemicalfreeparenting.com

To hold a CHEMICAL FREE KIDS workshop for your child care centre, organisation or other groups. Please contact Dr Edward Kachab. Email: edwardkachab@optusnet.com.au

Dr Lantz's nine steps for living in wellness in a toxic world

1. Take preconception care

Preconception care includes improving your lifestyle; cleaning up your environment; detoxifying; getting fit; staying positive and stress free, and using natural birth control.

2. Invest in early childhood

Children early years of development provide the foundation for long-term physical and mental wellbeing. Practices such as breastfeeding, and gentle discipline help establish strong bonds and enable the baby to feel loved, content and safe.

3. Conscious parenting

Try to imagine the world from your child's point of view. Children thrive on fun and connection, play, gentle guidance, physical closeness, patience, laughter; attention, warmth, to be listened to, to be loved, nutritional food. Provide safe spaces in which kids can be themselves.

4. Create a toxic free home

Children have a special vulnerability to chemicals. The environment that we provide has a profound effect on every facet of their development. For example, read the labels on the products that you buy and avoid the ones with harmful ingredients; avoid air fresheners; use natural pet care.

5. Eat for wellness

Whenever you buy your food whether that is at a supermarket, organic wholefood shop, health food shop, farmers' market, cafe or restaurant, talk to the owners/farmers about your ethical concerns, needs and requirements. Make it known what you want and improve the quality of the food that you eat from all sources.

6. When medicating kids consider the alternatives

Our children are more medicated than ever before. Drugs have become increasingly popular for treating kids with mood and behavioural 'problems'. Before reaching for a bottle of drugs, consider that most drugs have side effects. Look at alternatives such as a change in a child's diet, environment, or physical activity.

7. Living sustainability: our footprint on the Earth

Now we know that the earth's resources are not boundless. Today many of our forms of development are not sustainable. Consider

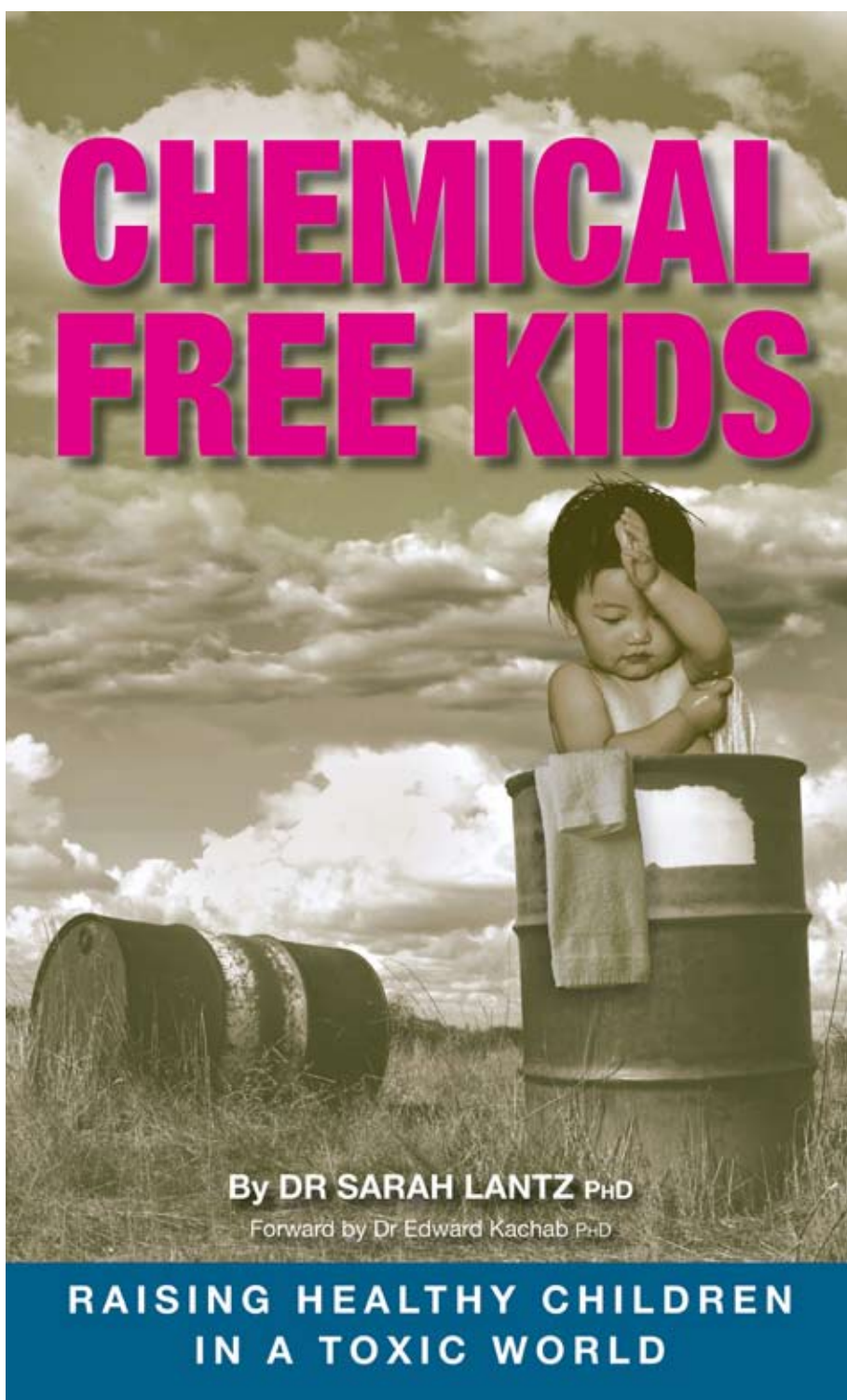
what sort of world you want your children and children's children to live in!

8. Measure what matters

Children and adolescents and how well they are faring, are the cornerstone of how healthy and sustainable a society is. Around the world there is now a growing demand to measure progress not based on Gross Domestic Product alone but also to include social and environmental factors such as health and wellbeing.

9. Contribution and activism

We all have the opportunity to take action and move towards a toxic free world. You can do this by becoming a more conscious consumer by asking questions before buying such as: Is this product made in line with my values? Does it contain hazardous chemicals?



New Montessori Books

Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents

Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents is a wonderful resource for any parent library whether it be in a school or in your home library. Maren Schmidt states 'Montessori education, more than anything, is about understanding and aiding the child's natural process of growth and learning. The principles, methods, and materials that Dr Montessori pioneered over one-hundred years ago are not only scientifically supported and researched, they are based on common sense.'

Maren explains Montessori theory and principles in every day language and even devotes a whole chapter on 'Montessori jargon' helping the reader to decode and understand Montessori terms. Common Montessori myths are addressed and why Montessori 'works' is discussed. Maren draws on 25 years of experience working with children and incorporates examples which we can all relate to.

What makes this book stand out from other Montessori books for parents is that it focuses on the principles and offers information so that you, the parent, can make informed choices and decisions about your child and Montessori education. Two chapters are

devoted to helping you find a school that meets the needs of your family. Suggested questions to ask and indicators to look for when visiting a school are also outlined.

Next time you're asked 'why do you send your child to Montessori?' you will have answers and research to support your response!

Amy Kirkham

Montessori Madness

If you have been looking for a book that can explain with simplicity and intelligence the basic concepts of Montessori education and exactly why it has the edge on traditional schooling go no further than Montessori Madness – A Parent to Parent Argument for Montessori Education by Trevor Eissler. His argument is impassioned and convincing and we learn a great deal about the fundamentals of how and why Montessori works along the way.

Eissler compares the different ways in which traditional schools and Montessori schools deal with the various issues that arise during a child's education, making it a book that is just as useful for parents with children already in a Montessori school, who want to know a little more about how the classroom works, as it is to the parent looking at the schooling options for their child.

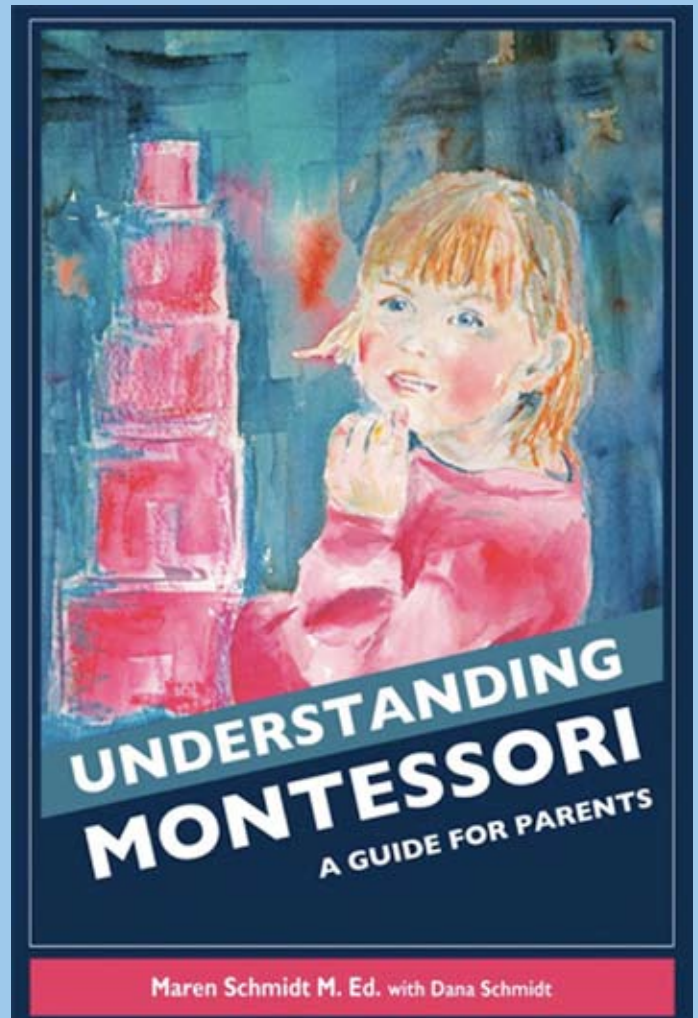
Montessori Books has recently changed hands and is now managed by the Montessori Australia Foundation. It continues to offer the world's largest range of Montessori books on the web.

In December 2009 we are offering a special deal on two new Montessori books written for parents.

Montessori Madness by Trevor Eissler and Understanding Montessori by Maren Schmidt are available separately for \$24.95 each or if purchased together for \$40. Or purchase 10 or more copies of one of the books for the special price of \$20 a copy.

Also Montessori and Early Childhood by Susan Feez is available for \$40 instead of the normal retail price of \$47.

Orders may be placed via the website: montessoribooks.com.au





He takes us through the basic concepts that underpin the Montessori philosophy, including the prepared environment, the child's sensitive periods, the concept of the absorbent mind as the effortless way in which a child can learn directly from their environment and how their natural desire to learn and become independent is facilitated through this approach.

Written with the excitement of someone who has just discovered that there is a better way of educating our children – one that brings out the qualities we wish for them in their school life such as enthusiasm, love of learning, independence, curiosity, focus and concentration - *Montessori Madness* is an essential addition to every parent's library.

Judy McGowan

Montessori and Early Childhood

'An engaging, clear and informative account of the influence and current relevance of Maria Montessori's contribution to educating young children. Thought provoking, practical and very readable - of value to professionals and parents alike' - Lynne Lawrence, Executive Director, Association Montessori Internationale

Early childhood education across the world has been influenced by the pioneering work of Maria Montessori, and this book by Susan

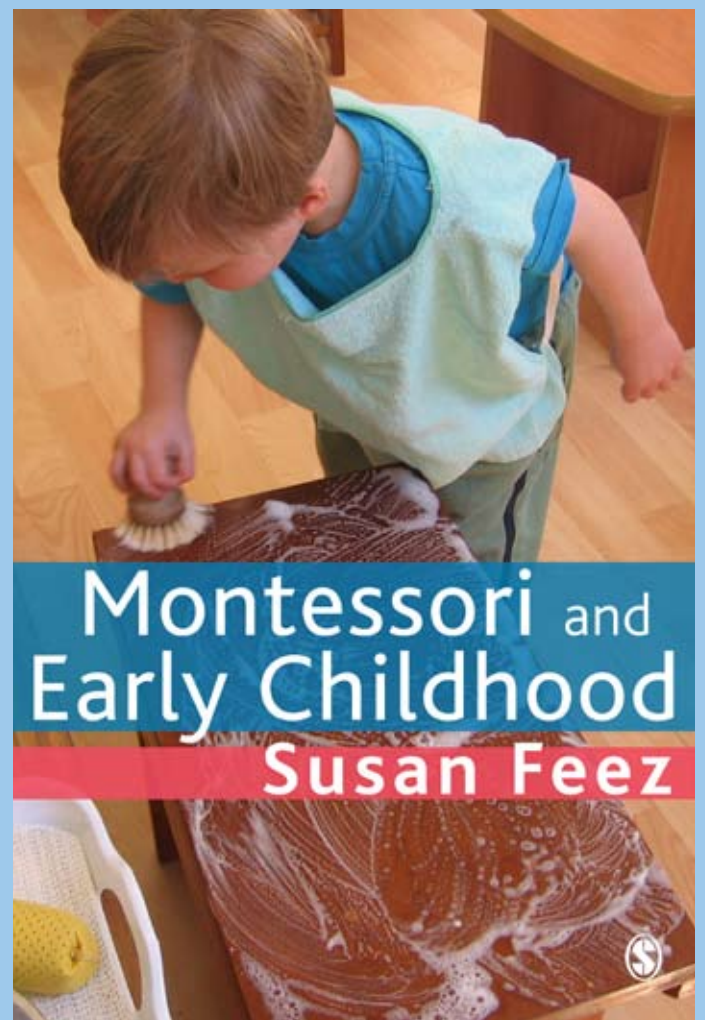
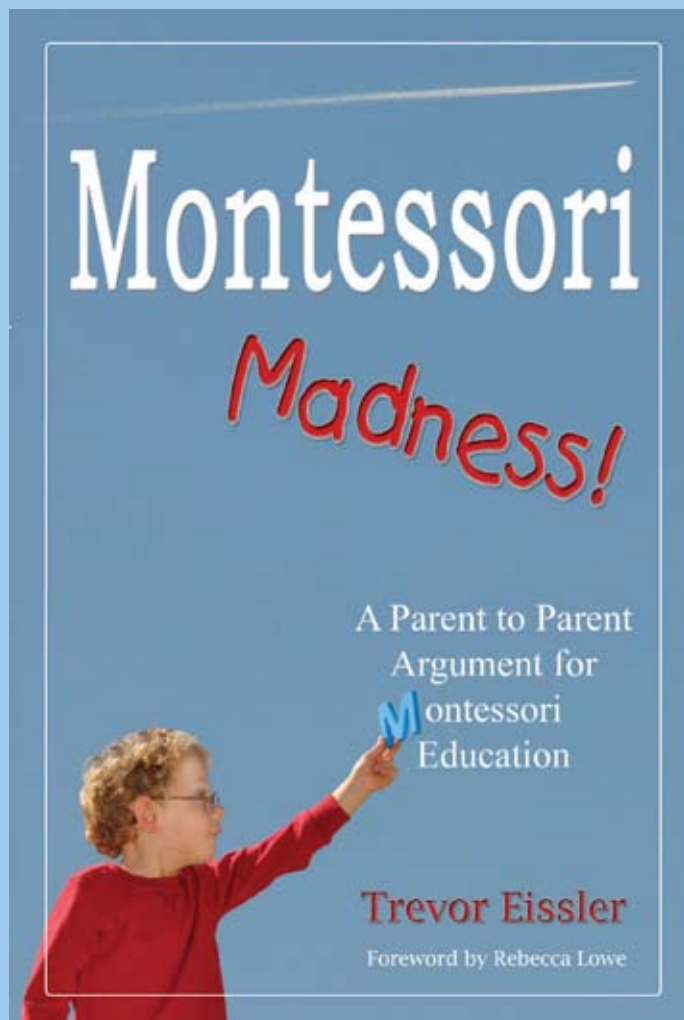
Feez provides a complete overview of Montessori pedagogy and practice. It considers the Montessori approach within the context of early childhood education and care, and examines it in the light of new insights from the fields of neuroscience and child development.

By helping the reader understand the influence of Montessori on contemporary early years policy and practice, the book outlines ideas relevant to all early years settings, and suggests ways for all early childhood educators to apply these ideas in practice.

The book looks in detail at:

- the Montessori story
- the child as worker and the adult as observer
- developing independence and concentration
- using the senses to build the foundations for learning
- early communication and language, early mathematics
- cultural knowledge and understanding
- Maria Montessori, and other early childhood pioneers

Within each chapter are definitions of the key concepts of the Montessori approach, questions for reflection and discussion, activities and suggestions for further reading. This book focuses on the 3 to 6 age range.



Websites, Blogs and Resources for Montessori Parents

Have you been looking for like-minded parents to have discussions with? Have you been looking for articles written for parents, by parents, teachers and administrators? Would you like some information about thoughtful parenting? Have you been looking for resources you can use at home?

We have compiled a selection of different websites which may be of interest to parents or to people looking to find out a bit more about Montessori. These provide general Montessori information, parenting information and tips as well as resources and suggestions of activities you can share with your children.

The Montessori Australia Foundation does not necessarily endorse these websites, and invites you to provide feedback as well as suggestions for other websites you have visited and found useful.

There is also some information provided about other Montessori organisations and links to a number of blogs, Twitter and Facebook sites which have a Montessori theme.

Montessori Organisations

montessori.org.au

Our own website has hundreds of pages of information about Montessori education in Australia including a comprehensive listing of all Montessori schools and centres, frequently asked questions and extensive information about the Montessori approach to education

montessorifoundation.org

This is the site of the Montessori Children's Foundation (MCF), a national Montessori charity. Its focus is to "promote Montessori as a means to achieving peace and social reform." It aims to assist children in Indigenous or disadvantaged communities through the Montessori approach. This site includes articles and research as well as information on different Montessori projects within Indigenous communities.

montessori-ami.org

This is the site of Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), founded by Dr Montessori in 1929. It lists the goals and activities of the organisation, offers information on the history of Montessori, the pedagogy, and the role of the Montessori teacher. Information about teacher training, affiliated societies and job vacancies can also be found on this site. A section on research includes the article that appeared in the journal 'Science' in September, 2006 on outcomes for children in a Montessori program, a longitudinal

study as well as comparisons between Montessori and 'traditional' schools. Information on resources including publications and materials can also be found on this site.

amiusa.org

The USA branch of the Association Montessori Internationale, also produces resources for parents and schools. Information about Montessori principles and practice can be found on this site as well as information about becoming a teacher, finding a school and up coming events. Schools in the USA can be found on this site and job vacancies are also listed.

montessori-namta.org

This is the site of the North American Montessori Teachers Association (NAMTA) and also has a wide range of resources for parents and schools. Here you will find a range of information on for example, home environment design; the Montessori toddler community (for the child under 3 years); common misconceptions about Montessori; A comparison to mainstream education ('A Paradigm Shift'). NAMTA sells DVDs and booklets specifically for parent education.

montessori.org.nz

This is the website of the Montessori association of Aotearoa (New Zealand) MANZ. It has sections for parents as well as for people working in Montessori schools. A useful parents guide to Montessori can be downloaded from the site and includes suggestions of 'what to look for in a Montessori school'. If you are looking for a Montessori school in New Zealand, this site will provide you with contact details and information about job vacancies.

Montessori Parenting Sites

themontessoriparentinginstitute.com

This site is based around a DVD series 'Because no one was born a parent'. A parenting and professional development tool, it introduces parents and educators to the fundamentals of child development from a Montessori perspective. The series can be ordered from this website and reviews from trainers, teachers and parents can be read. A section on frequently asked questions is currently being added.

kidstalknews/main.html

Kids Talk is a column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt. Mrs Schmidt founded a Montessori school and holds a Masters of Education from Loyola College in Maryland. She has over 25 years experience working with young children and holds teaching credentials from the Association Montessori Internationale. She is the author of Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents.

dailymontessori.com

This site offers tips, articles and topics about Montessori theory and practice, materials, activities and books. Montessori quotes, extracts and summaries of selected books can also be read. There is a focus on the child under 3 years and the age groups span: birth to 6 months, 6 to 12 months, 12 to 24 months and 24 to 36 months. Practical tips are offered and comments invited.

Resources

michaelolaf.net

This site, based in California, contains simple and sound information on the philosophy and practice of Montessori. It has for more than 20 years been producing catalogues which are much more than just catalogues: 'The Joyful Child' and 'The Child of the World' are excellent resources and chapters may be downloaded from these. They are filled with Montessori quotes, materials for use in the home, beautiful photos and drawings, and even fundraising ideas.

montessoribooks.com.au

This site offers a wide range of books on Montessori, parenting and related texts as well as a selection of books for children. Based in Melbourne, it stocks hard-to-find Montessori texts and offers friendly service. Books may be ordered directly from this website and reviews of books may also be read on this website.

montessorichild.com.au

This site is a great source of toys, some books, art materials, music resource and practical life materials such as trays, baskets, aprons and kitchenware that can be used in both the home environment as well as in the classroom. The company is based in NSW and orders can be placed via the website. At the time of review, there is a flat shipping rate of \$12 Australia wide, and catalogues are available for \$4.

montessoriservices.com and forsmallhands.com

This company is based in California and stocks a range of practical life materials, other classroom resources and has a link to forsmallhands.com which is tailored to parents. It specialises in providing real, child-size tools to enable young children to have successful experiences learning how to care for themselves and their environment. A range of books and educational materials, as well as fun, family activities are also available on this site.

Other sites which may be of interest

zerotothree.org

ZERO TO THREE is a United States nonprofit organisation that informs, trains and supports professionals, policy makers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. Founded in 1977 by top experts in child development, health and mental health, it has evolved into the organisation that plays a critical leadership role in promoting understanding around key issues affecting young children and their families, including child care, infant mental health, early language and literacy development, early intervention and the impact of culture on early childhood development. This site includes an informative introductory video. Articles are research based and reflect a cross cultural perspective. It contains resources for professionals and parents on developmental areas such as sleep and nutrition.

freeplaynetwork.org.uk

The Free Play Network aims to promote greater public understanding of the need for better play opportunities for children, by promoting discussion, exchange of information, and guidance on best practice in development of children's play opportunities.

This site includes photos, comments about designing play spaces for children, papers, presentations and summaries on play from various conferences around the world.

barefootmagazine.com.au

This site includes selected articles from the magazine 'Barefoot magazine' which is produced quarterly. It focuses on conscious parenting from birth to adolescence, with broader sections relating to eco-living, education, health and wellbeing and relationships. Barefoot seeks to inform, challenge, support, respect and inspire mothers, fathers, grandparents, carers and communities to live more consciously and value the importance of children and family life. You can also leave messages on the site by visiting their new blog.

Blogs

The following sites offer a range of topics and comments from parents, teachers and interested others. You will also find different excerpts of DVDs and YouTube footage on different Montessori programs for the child from birth to adolescence and related parenting issues. Some of these blogs are maintained by Montessori teachers or administrators.

educatingforlife.wordpress.com

This is written by a 6-12 Montessori teacher (and past Montessori student) based in Portland. There are some links to Montessori schools and organisations as well as a section on book reviews of Montessori related topics.

mimaustin.blogspot.com

MIM is Montessori in Motion and focuses on the child aged birth to three years. It contains comments from a birth to three teacher as well as a 3-6 teacher and provides useful, informative and practical information about topics such as the human tendencies of work and exploration. Information about making mobiles for the young child is included and some pictures help to illustrate the use of these mobiles.

montessoribyhand.blogspot.com

This is a blog by a Montessori 3-6 teacher in Mexico with an interest in fibres and craft. There are some interesting pictures and summaries on some projects, for example how to make paper as well as some pictures of children in a 3-6 environment in Mexico.

educationbydesign.blogspot.com

This blog contains observations and comments from John Long, Head of School at The Post Oak School, an AMI Montessori school in Houston, Texas. Montessori and other educationalists, books, current issues, magazines, journals are discussed.

Twitter and Facebook Links

[facebook.com/mariamontessori](https://www.facebook.com/mariamontessori)

twitter.com/mariamontessori

twitter.com/montessoriami

Allowing time for your child's development...

The first three years of life are potentially the most critical in terms of brain development for functioning throughout life. Childhood is a uniquely important developmental period, and it's important that parents build a supportive community that permits them to give their child all he needs in the critical early years. Parents may often feel they need to work hard in order to provide the things our culture tells us are important for children, such as toys, participation in early learning programmes, or beautiful clothing. But time, love and experiences together with a parent have proven to be among the most valuable things the adult can offer a child of any age. In fact, offering your young child too much at once can make the learning process harder.

Too many toys, activities, and outings can create confusion and actually work to a child's detriment, hampering his ability to focus. Whether a room contains three toys or thirty makes little difference in a young child's play, but an enormous difference in the level of confusion he has to sort through. Noise—from a TV, stereo, or too many other children—can also raise the chaos level and interfere especially with language learning. While outings and other structured activities are important, young children also need time to play and explore at their own leisure. Children are usually pretty good at telling us when they're bored but not when they're being overstimulated.

Recent research on brain development has shown that the brain is developing at a rapid speed from birth. This information supports educational theory and research on cognitive development in infants and toddlers. It's widely believed that a challenging and nurturing environment enhances children's cognitive development, but this alone isn't enough. It's the "expert other," an adult or more experienced peer, who is fundamental in supporting children's learning. This support is known as scaffolding. Initially, the adult or 'expert other' models an activity, followed by the adult and child working on a task together. Finally, the child performs the task on his own. The adult does less and less and the child does more and more.

Ideally, in any learning environment, children are initially spectators and then become participants. Having time for this mechanism to occur is essential. Early childhood professionals working with children under six have observed that a child will repeat an activity many times while working toward perfection of the task. As he repeats the selected activity, the child extends his own concentration span. It's essential that the child not be interrupted, even by adult comments about what he's doing, so that the concentration is allowed to deepen and extend.

Professionals advocate that infants and toddlers learn best from engaging in everyday play experiences; especially those selected by the child, rather than structured learning activities. An environment that's rich in resources and challenges, with knowledgeable and responsive adults, will encourage a child to engage in exploration and discovery and enhance skill development. Planning everyday play activities that encourage trial and error, manipulation and repetition will support brain development.

Play is a fundamental aspect of being a human being. Play is an integral part of learning, literacy, numeracy, practising motor skills, coordination, sharing, negotiating and thinking laterally and creatively.

Finally, it's important to remember that adults and children work for different reasons. Adults work to complete a task, to finish the job and move on to the next item on the list. Young children are working for an entirely different reason – to learn the process, not complete the product. A simple example might be cutting fruit: while the adult slices fruit to place it on a platter and serve, the child slicing fruit is learning to manipulate objects and direct his hand with control. Eventually, he will finish the task and serve the fruit, but it may take him a good deal of time, and patience from any on-looking adults.

Adult society is highly competitive but children's development is a process, not a race. Allowing children to take their own time and to explore will greatly assist their development.

How do I learn to observe my child? What am I looking for?

The best way to start is during a quiet time, when your child is already focussed on something – not television, computer games, etc. Sit in the same room, but at a distance, and think about how to cultivate the ability to simply watch, without speaking or directing his activity. You may find it useful to have a book to read or something to do, just so you're not tempted to start interacting. Begin with a short amount of time, something like 5 minutes, and you can gradually increase the time as you become better at simply sitting and watching.

What you're looking for is purposeful activity and focus. When your child is engaged in something meaningful to him, he will focus. This may not have anything to do with a toy, it may be learning to screw and unscrew the lid of a jar, for example. This will help you identify activities to make available for your child.

How do I know if my child is over-scheduled?

Try to think of your child's schedule in relation to your own life. If, for example, your child attends school or pre-school every day and then has an extra-curricular activity afterwards, this might compare to you spending a full day at work and then going out each night of the week. Many adults would find this schedule taxing, but now think about how someone your child's age might feel when keeping up that pace.

Another way of looking at it is this: if you're having trouble keeping up the pace taking your child from one activity to the next, he's probably feeling the same way. Have you tried to fit something in between two other events simply because that's the only time it's possible? Perhaps you need to reconsider the importance of the activity, or save it for six months later when it might be more easily scheduled.

How much free time does my child need?

Watching your child's behaviour is the best way to guide you in this direction. If you have a home environment with enough interesting activities for your child and ways to participate in family life, you will probably be able to tell when he becomes bored or needs some new stimulation. How often does this happen? Does

it happen at certain times of day? This information can help guide you in making decisions about when to schedule activities outside the home.

If you already have a very full schedule and are trying to eliminate things, but don't know where to cut back, try starting with a blank slate. If you remove all non-necessary activities and slowly add things back as you see a need, you're more likely to learn how much organised activity your child really needs.

How can we find meaningful ways to spend time together as a family without having to create more hours in a week and/or spend a lot of money?

Eating a meal together is powerful way for the family to be together and share each other's company, and there are many health benefits from eating together. Besides the sheer pleasure of getting to know one another better, statistics have shown that issues like obesity and types of healthy food consumed are positively affected when the family eats together regularly.

If you are just starting to have family meals with a young child or children, be patient, it will get easier with practise. Use the family meal as a chance to bring out candles, put flowers on the table, etc. You may be surprised that your young child is capable of using a small glass or other fine implements when first modelled by the parents.

The family meal is also a great way to model conversation. Hearing new words and topics discussed and practising taking turns speaking and listening are valuable lessons for your young child.

How much TV should I allow my child to watch?

There are many opinions and plenty of research available regarding children and television. If you're asking this question, you've probably already thought about it enough to realise that the best thing is as little as possible. But like many people, you may find it hard to limit because of the adult wish/need to have TV in the home, or your need to have some time for something else.

In this case, you should consider TV in the context of the entire family. First, is there something else that would interest your child instead of TV when you really need some dependable adult time? Can you keep that activity put away so it's special when it comes out and provides you with the needed time?

Next, is there a way that adults can limit TV viewing to a time when children are asleep, so they're exposed to less?

After these issues have been worked through, you can make a decision about how much time you will permit your child to watch TV.

TV isn't a suitable medium for babies or toddlers, who develop and learn out of direct interaction with real people, and it needs limiting for pre-schoolers who get much more out of doing than out of listening and watching. Two hours viewing is two hours less of active play and talk. That doesn't mean it should be totally banned, though, any more than we have to ban snack foods in order to give children a good diet. Choose your times (like when a child's too tired to do anything active and/or you're too tired to talk cheerfully!) and choose his viewing.

How can I give my child enough time and still keep life moving at the pace we need to get things done?

Begin with a schedule in mind – what time do you have to get out of the house, eat meals, prepare for sleep, etc. Giving a child all the time he needs doesn't mean never leaving the house, it means recognising the child's deep need for unscheduled time and allowing for it. If you've already worked through what organised activities are truly needed, then you've done a lot of the work already.

For times when you must follow a schedule, create enough time ahead to comfortably allow your child some freedom of pace, then stick to your schedule. If your child is aware that at a certain time you must leave for school, regardless of what he's wearing, and if you follow through by actually taking him to school without shoes (or while still in pyjamas), you have allowed him to experience the consequence of his actions. It's not likely he will let that happen a second time.





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