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SOUTH AFRICAN MONTESSORI ASSOCIATION

October 2011

Message from the President

Benefits of Vertical Age Grouping in Montessori Schools

One of the Montessori fundamentals is our vertical age grouping in our classes. This is also one of the first things that new parents will notice when walking into the Montessori environment. It derives from the Planes of Development, focussing on the needs of each child in the three year cycle.

The Montessori philosophy values vertical grouping as children of different ages working together presents various educational opportunities, such as role modelling and teaching. I have seen that leadership qualities are gained when children have confidence and self-esteem. There is evidence of spontaneous work choice and creativity as they inspire one another. Children learn by watching one another and gain valuable insights.

The vertical grouping recognizes that children develop physically, emotionally, cognitively and socially at different paces and are therefore able to develop as individuals. This is what we are trying to achieve when working at Montessori Schools.

Being an ex-traditional teacher not used to having children of different ages in one class, I thought that I was being set up for disaster, but I have never experienced any negativity around the three year age grouping. This was also one of Montessori's clever ideas in mimicking the home environment and bringing calmness, stability and normalisation into the class. I feel that there is place for the children of the same age to have time together; for example when I take my senior children separately and allow them to socialize, as I do feel that they are young teenagers and need time to discuss important matters in their lives.

Another example in my experience is when I witnessed the High School boys and Elementary boys playing rugby together. Some of the rules were changed to protect the younger ones, such as no tackling. This was done spontaneously and with empathy and thought. Seeing all the boys playing together at break-time, supporting and helping the younger ones, made me realise once again how fortunate we are in being in a Montessori environment.

I believe that vertical age grouping works in Montessori Schools. We allow the children to develop into their full potential and by them gaining respect for each other in a space of holistic learning.

Charl du Toit
SAMA President.

The Beauty of Multi-age Groupings

Lakshmi A. Kripalani

It can be a challenge, especially for a teacher accustomed to a high level of control in a single-grade classroom. Some teachers are overwhelmed by the quantity of the curriculum. Like the pressure of a volcano building up within them, they carry the responsibility for presenting the entire curriculum to each and every child.

Within single-age groupings, teachers frequently, give presentations, assuming most students are functioning at the same level. But it is an illusion if teachers assume that the abilities of the children in a homogeneous group are similar. And when a teacher creates smaller groups of high, medium and lower performers, inevitably some fall behind emotionally and academically.

There can also be illusions about learning. When presentations follow each other in a quick succession, the teacher may have "covered" everything, but the children may be overloaded and have not had time to assimilate the information

In multi-age groupings the children are at different stages of achievement. Older Students transmit their mastery to the younger ones or slower learners. They become more efficient in their work and more aware of their strengths and weaknesses They develop leadership qualities. The teacher is free to observe, to lay aside the volcanic pressure of rushing through the curriculum. The teacher can feel confident that children are covering more than he or she could ever have delivered alone.

In such a classroom there are as many transmitters of knowledge as there are receivers. There is no room for developing an inferiority complex or falling through the cracks. In her book, From Childhood to Adolescence, Dr. Montessori said, "It is very evident that the need to help others or to seek their collaboration cannot manifest itself when one is convinced of one's own inadequacy."

Multi-age grouping encourages both individual motivation and respect for others.

In defense of multiage grouping

The extreme case of age grouping that I encountered was in the refugee camp in post-partition of India. I had no choice as to what age child I took in the school. I was the only teacher and worked with every child who showed up. It enlightened me to experience the natural process of teaching and learning among all age groups.

Narrower grouping does make sense—if we have not done our Montessori classrooms well.

But when we have choice in how we build our classes, we have different ethical issues to consider.

I bring this up because Mark Powell of Berkeley Montessori School has recently asked members of the Montessori ListServ to help him construct an article on age groupings. It is his response to an article Michele Monson, head of Whitby School in Greenwich, CT, wrote a couple years ago for Montessori Life, advocating two-year age groupings in the elementary program to prepare students for inevitable testing.

To decide which adaptations or which innovations are wise we should consider Montessori's insights, which is no easy matter.

The question of freedom has been misunderstood. Freedom without a prepared environment leads to nowhere. Prepared environment does not mean the didactic material arranged beautifully on shelves. Prepared environment means learning in an environment where young and old students function at different levels. This is why she insisted on three-year groups functioning together.

The problem starts when the older children are not prepared. The environment is not enriched, and the teachers must teach each child independently. No teacher can reach each child individually even in the same age group. Generally it turns into group teaching where those with less capabilities get lost.
Narrower grouping does make sense—if we have not done our Montessori classrooms well.

Lakshmi Kripalani is a distinguished Sindhi pioneer in the fields of education and poetry. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Experimental Psychology from Bombay University and a Master's Degree in Education from Seton Hall University,N.J. She was trained by Dr. Maria Montessori and has worked with her and with Mario Montessori.
Lakshmi pioneered her first school in Karachi 1943 as protest to the traditional method of education with a special interest in educating single and abandoned women and child widows. After the partition of India, she started Pawai Camp School without walls for the refugees. In 1962, Mario Montessori invited her to the States during the revival of Montessori method where she started Montessori schools In Iowa and in Newark. In 1966, she established Montessori Teacher Training Center in N.J.
Lakshmi is listed in 'Who is Who in Education' and in various International Directories. She is the recipient of the golden awards for poetry.
Although she is retired now, she is very active in writing, lecturing and consulting. She is presently a columnist for a national newspaper *Public School Montessorian*. Lakshimi's writing on Montessori is also available in two recently published volumes.

Image: © Randburg Montessori.

The benefits of mixed-age grouping

Lillian G. Katz

Editor's Note: This article was originally written for a non-Montessori audience and all Dr. Katz's guidelines may not be relevant in a Montessori context. It is, however, a valuable resource as it highlights the ways in which mixed-age groupings are beneficial both inside and outside of Montessori.

Goodlad and Anderson, who introduced the modern notion of the non-graded elementary school in 1959, raised our awareness of the fact that age is a crude indicator of what learning experiences children are ready for. Implementation of Goodlad and Anderson's ideas originally consisted largely of organizing children in groups by ability rather than by age, thereby homogenizing groups in a different way! We have come to understand that the benefits of mixed-age grouping rest on the assumption that the differences within a group of children can be a source of rich intellectual and social benefits. The terms "ungraded" and "nongraded" used by Goodlad and Anderson suggest what we do *not* do in mixed-age settings – separate children into grade groups by age – but they fail to describe what we try *to* do. That may be better conveyed by the use of the term "mixed-age grouping." A mixed-age group of children in which the children's age range is larger than a year – sometimes two years and sometimes more – is intended to optimize the educative potential of the mixture itself.

Although humans are not usually born in litters, we seem to insist that they be educated in them. The time that children spend in groups in schools and child care centers, particularly for preschoolers, amounts to replacing families and spontaneous neighborhood groups as contexts for child-to-child interaction for large portions of children's waking hours. More and more children are deprived of the information and models of competencies that once were available to them in natural mixed-age groups. The intention of mixed-age grouping in early childhood settings is to increase the heterogeneity of the group so as to capitalize on the differences in the experience, knowledge, and abilities of the children.

"Although humans are not usually born in litters, we seem to insist that they be educated in them."

Opportunity to Nurture

When we ask a five-year-old to be tolerant of a four-year-old's first fumbling efforts to put on his or her jacket, or a six-year-old to be appreciative of a five-year-old's early efforts to read, we have the beginnings of parent education. Our young children need real contexts in which their dispositions to be nurturing can be manifested and strengthened. Furthermore, the young children who are encouraged, comforted and nurtured by older children will be able to emulate their older classmates when they themselves become the older ones in a group. Children need opportunities not only to observe and imitate a wide range of competencies, but also to find companions among their peers who match, complement, or supplement their interests in different ways.

Ways of Learning

Single-age groups seem to create enormous normative pressures on the children and the teacher to expect all the children to possess the same knowledge and skills. There is a tendency in a homogeneous age group to penalize the children who fail to meet normative expectations. There is no evidence to show that a group of children who are all within a twelve-month age range can be expected to learn the same things, in the same way, on the same day, at the same time. The wide range of knowledge and skills that exists among children within a single-age group suggests that whole-group instruction, if overused, may not best serve children's learning.

On the other hand, the wider the age span in a group, the wider the range of behavior and performance likely to be accepted and tolerated by the adults as well as by the children themselves. In a mixed-age group, a teacher is more likely to address differences, not only between children but within each individual child. In a mixed-age group, it is acceptable for a child to be ahead of his or her same-age peers in math, for example, but behind them in reading, or social competence, or vice versa.

Research on social benefits indicates that children very early associate different expectations with different age groups. Experiments have shown that even a three-year-old, when shown pictures of older and younger children in hypothetical situations, will assign different kinds of behavior to an older child than to a younger child. For instance, younger children assign to older children instructive, leadership, helpful, and sympathizing roles, whereas older children assign to younger children the need for help and instruction. Thus in the mixed-age group, younger children perceive the older ones as being able to contribute something, and the older children see the younger ones as in need of their contributions. These mutually reinforcing perceptions create a climate of expected cooperation beneficial to the children, and to the teachers who otherwise feel they are doing all the giving.

Increasing the age range automatically increases the number of teachers available, for younger children particularly. One potential problem that may arise when children assume the role of teacher to other children is that some older children will give younger ones incorrect information, poor suggestions, or wrong advice. When teachers observe such interactions, they can benefit from learning where both children need additional help, and they can correct any misinformation that has been exchanged.

Results of experiments in which children worked in groups of three, either in same-age or mixed-age groups, have shown that in the latter, older children spontaneously facilitated other children's behavior. In a single-age triad, on the other hand, the same children spontaneously became domineering and tended to engage in one-upmanship. When groups of children ranging in age from seven to nine years or from nine to eleven years were asked to make decisions, they went through the processes of reaching a consensus with far more organizing statements and more leadership behavior than children in same-age groups. When the same children dealt with identical kinds of tasks in same-age groups, there were more reports of bullying behavior. Other prosocial behaviors such as help-giving and sharing were more frequent in mixed-age groups. Turn taking was smoother, and there was greater social responsibility and sensitivity to others in mixed-age groups than in single-age groups (Chase & Doan, 1994).

Observations of four- and five-year-olds in a group found that when the teacher asked the older children who were not observing the class rules to remind the younger ones what the rules were, the older children's own "self-regulatory behavior" improved. The older children could become quite bossy, but the teacher has a responsibility to curb the children's bossiness in any group.

Social Participation

In a mixed-age group, younger children are capable of participating and contributing to far more complex activities than they could initiate if they were by themselves. Once the older ones set up the activity, the younger ones can participate, even if they could not have initiated it.

Research indicates that mixed-age groups can provide a therapeutic environment for children who are socially immature. Younger children will less quickly rebuff an older immature child than the child's same-age mates. Younger children will allow an older child to be unsophisticated longer than will his or her age peers (Katz et al., 1990).

Intellectual Benefits

Even four-year-olds spontaneously change the way they speak to suit the age of the listener. They change the length of the sentence, the tone, and the words they use. Studies of cognitive development suggest that cognitive conflict arises when interacting children are at different levels of understanding, regardless of their ages. If two children are working on a task that one understands well and another does not, the latter is likely to learn from the former if he or she understands the task very well, and if they argue. Only if one understands something very well can explanations be varied during argument (Katz et al., 1990).

Risks and Concerns

Every method of grouping children has risks. One concern with mixed-age grouping is ensuring that

younger children are not overwhelmed by older or more competent ones. Teachers have an important role to play in maximizing the potential benefits of the age mixture by encouraging children to turn to each other for explanations, directions, and comfort. Teachers can also encourage older children to read stories to younger ones, and to listen to younger students read.

Teachers can also encourage older children to take responsibility for an individual younger child or for younger children in general. Teachers can encourage older children not to gloat over their superior skills, but to take satisfaction in their competence in reading to younger children, in writing things down for them, in explaining things, in showing them how to use the computer, in helping them find something, in helping them get dressed to go outdoors, and so forth.

Teachers can show older children how to protect themselves from being pestered by younger children, for example, by saying to the younger children, "I can't help you right this minute, but I will as soon as I finish what I am doing." Teachers can also help younger children learn to accept their own limitations and their place in the total scheme of things, as well as encourage older children to think of roles and suitable levels that younger ones could take in their work or in their activities. The basic expectation is that the children will be respectful and caring of one another (Lipsitz, 1995).

When teachers discourage older children from calling younger ones "cry babies" or "little dummies," they help resist the temptation of age stereotyping. Every once in a while one can observe a teacher saying to a misbehaving first grader something like "that behavior belongs in kindergarten." The teacher still will expect the first grader to be kind and helpful to the kindergartners during recess, though he or she has just heard kindergartners spoken of in a condescending way! A mixed-age group can provide a context in which to teach children not only to appreciate a level of understanding or behavior they themselves recently had, but also to appreciate their own progress and to develop a sense of the continuity of development.

For More Information

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Age groupings, class size and adult to child ratios

Sharon Caldwell

What did Dr. Montessori and the "first generation" of Montessori directors do and say?

Age grouping

Multiage grouping (sometimes called vertical grouping) is a signature feature of Montessori education. Maria Montessori placed so much importance on this that she stated:

"This fact makes such a difference, that if one were to put all the children of the same age together, there would be no success, and it would be impossible to apply our method. We do not conceive of putting children of the same age all classed together. The logic of this is seen in nature; a family of three children, born at different times, naturally gives the difference in age."(1)

This fact makes such a difference, that if one were to put all the children of the same age together, there would be no success, and it would be impossible to apply our method.

In order to function properly, a Montessori classroom must be multiage and non-graded. This means that children of at least three year age difference (normally 3 - 6, 6 - 9 and 9 - 12) are grouped together, and are not divided into separate grade- or norm-referenced groups within those categories.(2) Infant-toddler groups are usually split based on whether a child is able to walk or not (about one year - 18 months). Middle and High School groupings follow different models[1] as Dr. Montessori was not very specific at that level, although there is much evidence to support multi-age groupings at all levels.

According to Joosten-Chotzen, Dr. Montessori stipulated that there should be "no more than three years' difference. Groups should include children from 3-6, 6-9 and 9-12 years of age."(3) This is the format usually followed in Montessori schools that recognize the multiage principles, although there is a worrying trend toward reducing the age range in many schools.(4) There is, however, evidence that Dr. Montessori came to favor much larger age ranges. In *The Child, Society and the World*, the stipulation is that there be ***at least*** three years difference in age.(5) There are references to children as young as "little more than two years old"(6) and "up to the age of seven" in the Children's Houses.(7)

Lakshmi Kripalani, who was trained by Dr. Montessori in 1946 and who edited the Karachi Lectures, has consistently campaigned for multiage groups, regarding this factor as critical to the successful implementation of Montessori practice.(8)

Class sizes

Similarly classes were much larger, with references to classes of fifty (9) and ninety (10) children. In Karachi in 1946 Dr. Montessori stated:

> In order to understand freedom, you will have to take a long, long exercise. The more you put the children of different age together, the more will be the progress and the result will be more psychological discoveries. In our last school there were some hundred children of every age separated in groups of fifty children of every age. But these places were not closed or limited. The children could go from one place to another with perfect freedom. … It has been noticed that some little children when they came in contact with grownup children, they are interested in same things.(11)

Elsewhere, Dr. Montessori states that with fewer than twenty-five children "is sufficient" and that below that, "the standards become lower, and in a class of eight children it is difficult to obtain good results."(12) She advises "forty and even fifty" children per class, resulting in "a more perfect discipline than in ordinary schools."(13)

Obviously physical structure plays a large role in how big classes can be, but it is generally considered best practice in Montessori to have larger, rather than smaller, classes. Larger classes allow for

sufficient children at each age in the three year spread to ensure that no more than 1/3 of the class is replaced each year. There is also a greater opportunity for social development in a larger class than in a small one. A well-balanced class of 30+ children will allow for at least 10 children in each age.(14)

Progression from one level to the next

Margaret Stephenson, who worked closely with Dr. Montessori, describes classes where children are accepted at 2½ or 3 and stay to "around 7", and gives some guidelines as to how this goal is gradually reached over a period of three years. Beginning with only 12 to 15 children, the class comprises children ranging from 2½ to around 4 and is gradually built up to 35 adding only younger children. This class is to be run by only one teacher, assisted by a non-teaching aide.

Her comments on progression from one group to another raise important issues which underpin the success of the multiage grouping – the absence of rigidly demarcated levels and the policy of free movement between the groups:

> There should be no arbitrary cutting out of the children from the Primary class at six. ... Some children are ready to move into the Junior class at 6; that is to say, they have finished all the Primary work, in all subjects, by then. Others are not ready until 6; some children not until 7.
>
> Again, some children of 6 may have finished all the primary language materials, but may not have completed all the mathematics work. Others may have done a lot of history and geography, but very little biology and mathematics. ...(15)

This natural movement between groups is facilitated by the design of the physical environment which ideally has "arches with sliding doors leading from room to the next, or preferably, one open space, with low shelving between the groups," thus ensuring that "the six-year old who has got to the end of the primary apparatus in one subject but not in all, can go in and out to whatever classroom holds the work he is needing."(16)

This model is confirmed in Dr. Montessori's own writings:

> Wherever our method has been developed, there was always a relation between the pre-elementary, and the elementary education. One of the secrets is the open doors. In our schools there is no such thing as a closed door which stands like a policeman barring the way. The open door to the other rooms gives a freedom of circulation, between the different grades, and this circulation is of the utmost importance for the development of culture.(17)

She confirms that the rooms for children aged 3 to 6 are not "rigidly separated from that of the children from seven to nine" and that the younger children can get ideas from the class above.(18) It was this freedom of movement which resulted in many of the materials initially developed for older children being incorporated into the 3 – 6 curriculum.(19)

The movement is bi-directional with older children being free to go to the room where the younger children are working, "in search of a former activity and take up the older exercises ... Because evidently in their advanced exercises they lacked some clarity. This is very common." She observed that this "never happens in the older methods of education because it would be looked upon as such a disgrace to go back!"(20) This is important for the development of both the older and the younger groups.

In *The Advanced Montessori* Method, Dr. Montessori describes taking older children into the Children's House after reading them Itard's book:

> It occurred to us to take the older of such children to a "children's house" and show them our educational method. They took the greatest interest in it, and some of them ... such children are able to follow the development of the child mind with extraordinary sympathy. However, if we reflect that the best teachers for children are children themselves, and that

little tots like the company of another child much better than that of an adult, we need not be surprised at the downfall of another prejudice.(21)

Adult:child ratios

Staff to child ratios are also important. Too many adults in the classroom can disrupt the interaction model favoured by Dr. Montessori.

As we have seen, Montessori classes at all levels tend to be larger than what is considered the norm in conventional schooling. This is precisely because the mixed- age grouping facilitates both independent work and peer support. It also acts as a control of error against too much adult intervention.

According to Dr. Montessori class size is important for the development of the individual personality as well: "When the classes are fairly big, differences of character show themselves more clearly, and wider experience can be gained. With small classes this is less easy."(22)

Mario Montessori wrote in support of "40 children under one teacher, using one complete set of apparatus" as the optimum, and acknowledges that larger classes, up to 80, are workable.(23)

When schools adopt the large class sizes, but then employ additional staff to offer the "individual attention" demanded by parents, the resulting adult:child ratio encourages more adult intervention than is optimal for a Montessori programme.(24) AMI-USA favours one adult in a classroom of 28 – 35 children and if another adult is required for licensing, that adult should be non-teaching.(25)

Best Practice in regular child-care and schooling dictates smaller numbers of children to trained adult than is required in Montessori. Fewer than 15 children per adult will generally result in more adult intervention than is optimal. A higher number of adults per child could, however, be necessary when there is a higher than usual number of children in an environment with severe special needs, or the physical structure of the environment would raise safety issues which cannot be addressed by the usual

These guidelines from Dr. Montessori and her early followers pose some significant issues in terms of school structural design and also for policies regarding moving children from one class level to the next. Multiage in Montessori is not merely a variation on multi-grade classing, nor a grouping according to ability. It is a conscious and purposeful strategy to achieve a fully inclusive environment that not only accommodates the heterogeneous nature of the human condition but one in which diversity is actively encouraged.

Notes:

1. Maria Montessori,*The child, society and the world*, (Clio, 1988) 65-66.
2. Even in multiage classes outside of Montessori non-gradedness is regarded as best practice. See for example the work of Lillian Pancoe and Michelle Katz. [See Survey of resources for full details.]
3. Maria Montessori, London lecture 1923 q. by Joosten-Chotzen, "What difference of age should there be among children in a Montessori group?" Around the child 6. 12-14.
4. Sharlet McClurkin, "Backsliding on multi-age grouping." Public School Montessorian. Vol 8. No 4 (Summer 1996) is just one of a plethora of resources addressing this problem. Compromises on the principle of multi-age groupings is often attributed to legislation and regulations which mandate the separation of children under 4 from those over 4.
5. Maria Montessori, The child, society and the world, 65.
6. Maria Montessori, Dr. Montessori's own handbook, 24
7. Maria Montessori, *The advanced Montessori method* II. 4.
8. Laksmi Kripalani "Putting philosophy into practice" PSM, Winter, 1992.
9. Maria Montessori, Dr. Montessori's own handbook, 68. In the Karachi lectures (31, 1946) she described a school of 100 children divided into two groups of fifty children "of every age".
10. Tim Seldin describes a class which was run by "Mother Isabelle" in Ravenshill where he personally observed ninety children ranging in age from 3 to 12, in a great hall. (Verbal communication).
11. Maria Montessori. Karachi lectures. (31. 1946.)
12. Maria Montessori, *The child, society and the world*, 65.
13. Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child* Clio Press, 1988. 302.
14. Maria Montessori, *The child, society and the world*, 65.
15. Margaret Stephenson. Plan which will best produce the results Montessori can give. NAMTA Jouranl. 25.3. Summer 2000. 41.
16. Ibid. 41 – 42.
17. Maria Montessori,*The child, society and the world*, 65-66.
18. Maria Montessori, *The absorbent mind*. 207.
19. Maria Montessori,*The child, society and the world*, 65-68; *The absorbent mind*. 207.
20. Maria Montessori,*The child, society and the world*, 68.
21. Maria Montessori, *The advanced Montessori method* II. 200.
22. Maria Montessori. *The absorbent mind*. 205.
23. Maria Montessori and Claude Claremont. Montessori and the deeper freedom. NAMTA Journal 23.2. Spring 1998. 76.
24. Jan Gaffney. Montessori myths. Montessori voices. Available online at www.montessori.org.nz/myths.
25. AMI/USA Standards for an AMI Montessori classroom. Downloadable as a pdf on AMI/USA website.

Student-faculty ratio in the Montessori classroom –A nuanced assessment.

John Moncure and Darlene Maxwell

For how many children should a Montessori guide be responsible? This frequently asked question, remarkably, after almost one hundred years of the practice of the Montessori method in the classroom, has no precise answer.[1] No definitive research has been conducted in an attempt to answer the question, either. A simple observation can explain the reason why. The variety of experiences of the distinguished Montessorians to whom we look for answers to questions such as these has led them to different opinions. This essay proposes not to give a numerical answer but to assess the variables that make up the equation leading to different answers—all correct—to this question.

Three major factors influence the number of students in a classroom. The first of these is physical space. Obviously the larger a classroom the more children can work comfortably in it. The second is experience of the classroom guide. The more classroom experience she has, the more important details she can juggle. The third is homogeneity. The more "sameness" of a class the larger the number (and higher the ratio) of children.

This issue is important for economic and pedagogical reasons. In a private school with tuition of $4,000 per child, the difference between a class of 24 with two adults and a class of 30 with the same two adults is $24,000. If this school has four classrooms the difference in revenue is almost $100,000 per year. Numbers like these can easily make the difference between survival and extinction of a school.

The pedagogical advantage of higher student-faculty ratio is a function of the dynamic of the Montessori classroom. Anyone who has observed a class for any length of time knows that children tend to learn from each other more readily than they do from adults. But just as evident is the child's initial reliance on the adult as the shortest route to "the answer". This is easily understandable: from the day they are born they receive input from adults. The fastest way to the information a child seeks is through the adult. The larger the student ratio to adults, the more difficulty a child looking for the easy answer has gaining the attention of the guide. A child in this situation will eventually depend on other children in the classroom, building teamwork, negotiating skills, and gaining a sense of self-reliance in being able to "do it myself". Beyond a certain point, of course, the logic breaks down. The effort here is to determine at what point we maximize the advantages of group coöperation without suffering from overload on the adults in the class.

Physical space is hardly the most important factor in the question of student-adult ratio, but it is the most concrete.[1] Most states regulate the number of square feet per child allowed according to age. South Carolina, for example, required 35 square feet per child ages 3 to 6.[1] But this number usually addresses a childcare or traditional classroom setting rather than the demands of a Montessori environment. Because children in a Montessori class move about the classroom and need to spread their materials out on the floor they typically need more space than children in a non-Montessori environment. Tim Seldin recommends 50 square feet per child at the early childhood level, 75 for elementary, and 100 for secondary level.[1]

This number is a useful rule of thumb, but hardly inviolable. In a well-regulated classroom with fewer square feet per child, the absence of space can actually make children more respectful, more mindful of space. Thus, judging the size of a class simply by square footage of the space is not useful in the absence of other factors. In any case, square footage addresses only maximum classroom size, and impacts student-to-teacher ratios only because the divisor (the number of adults) must be a whole number!.

Generally, the more experience a classroom guide has, the more likely she can manage a larger number of students. "Experience" refers, of course, not merely to years in the classroom, but rather the increases in learning and insight that should accompany those years. An experienced directrice can identify a child in need of redirection well before a neophyte, and she can redirect more effectively so the child remains on task longer. Further, her skill in creating a normalized environment is more refined. Thus, while a new classroom guide might need the 12.5 minutes per child that a 1:12 ratio allows, a more experienced teacher might need only the ten minutes available in a class with a ratio of 15:1.

No easy measuring tool exists to assess the level of expertise of the teacher. A prudent method of determining where a teacher is at a given point in her career is to start small and add slowly. If a class has 24 children and two adults with relatively low levels of stress, and runs like a Swiss watch, the addition of a twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth child may prove illuminating. It may cause a short-term decrement in the rhythm of the class, or it may last the remainder of the year. But, unless the additional children are exceptionally energetic or ill-behaved, it will not destroy the general level of cohesion or peacefulness in the class.

Homogeneity is the most difficult aspect of a class to determine, and is probably the most important. By homogeneity we mean the "sameness" of the students, but sameness in many different ways. Looking at the age of the students is one way to assess sameness. A class with all students born in the same twelve-month period would be more alike than a class with a three-year span in ages, but it would deprive the environment of many of the benefits of the multi-age Montessori classroom. By age we mean not merely chronological age but rather developmental age—academic, social, psychological, and physiological. Thirty children in a range of these four components of developmental maturity spanning three years only is not beyond the means of an experienced classroom directress. But, in truth, the classroom that manages such a tight grouping is a rarity indeed.

Another measure of sameness is cultural background. Children with different ethnic backgrounds bring to the classroom a glorious richness, but they also require of the adult a greater ability to communicate and manage misunderstandings in communications. Sometimes these differences play themselves out in the classroom, and sometimes they operate in the parking lot with parents. In either case, cultural differences invariably create a level of confusion. A simple example would be an English-language classroom with several children who come from Spanish-speaking homes. The greater the level of cultural diversity, the more adept at diffusing, redirecting, and coordinating the adult in the classroom must be. Having made this point, we believe that cultural diversity brings more advantages in the long run than challenges in the short run. Further, if a class could be made of children from twenty-four (or thirty!) different cultures, a new kind of equilibrium would result. Rather than misunderstandings based on linguistic, ethnic, or cultural differences, children and adults would embrace a common assumption of the challenges of communication and dangers of assumption (or prejudice) and avoid many of the pitfalls of a diverse population. The children would make it so.

A third important component of homogeneity is economic. Younger children do not recognize designer labels or frayed jeans. But older children do, and that recognition adds a task requiring delicate treatment from a teacher. Public Montessori classrooms do not have the automatic filter called tuition, and children come from the full range of economic backgrounds—mirroring approximately the population around the school. Private Montessori schools that accept public funding fall into the same category, albeit probably to a lesser degree. What does this matter? A group of children all of whom had a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast are obviously more prepared for their school day than a group in which perhaps one-third come to school hungry or manifesting the stress their single parent may feel. The classroom guide of the former has far fewer glass balls to juggle than her counterpart in the latter.

The absence of nurturing is the fourth component of homogeneity in this discussion. So many of the children coming into the classrooms today are desperately in need of being nurtured. This absence pervades all socioeconomic levels. Whether it is the spirit that needs nurturing[1] or the physical needs of the child that are not being met is truly irrelevant. The fact that a large proportion of the children receive either none or very little of both, one or the other stands as an impediment to their learning in a Montessori environment unless the teachers respond to their needs. Maria Montessori teaches us to follow

the lead of the child and in this case that means responding to their need for nurturing.

A fifth component of homogeneity to consider is the inclusion of children with special needs in the classroom. When students with special cognitive, physical, and/or emotional needs join the classroom community, the school, and more importantly, the classroom director must study and understand the parameters of the identified special need, adapt the curriculum to meet the highly specific needs of the student, and teach the other members of the classroom and school community how to honor those needs.[1] Here again lies another factor when determining the student-faculty ratio in a Montessori classroom.

As the physical and spiritual development of the child are equally important to Montessori teachers, and as Montessori teachers are prepared to focus on the development of the individual child's spiritual, academic, and physical needs, it is logical to assume that the more children who come into the classrooms in need of nurturing will require more time from the teachers, thereby demanding consideration for a smaller student-faculty ratio.[1] However, we need to remember when the student-teacher ratio becomes too small, the children and the teachers become too dependent on each other and do not successfully negotiate that development of either the "transformed" teacher or the self-confident, independent, self-motivated, self-disciplined child.

These three characteristics—physical space, teacher experience, and homogeneity—inform the decision of student-faculty ratio. No simple equation can replace a careful assessment of the infinite array of variables. But the conclusion is clear. A classroom should have as close to fifteen students per adult as possible for both economic and educational reasons. The "as possible" in this formula demands a well-considered weighing of the impact of the factors for consideration on the adults in the classroom and, ultimately, on the children.

Notes:

1. Maximum recommended ratios for accreditation by the International Montessori Council are 1:15 for Early Education classrooms and 1:20 for elementary and adolescent classrooms. Recommended maximums for both levels are one trained Montessori teacher to thirty children. Tim Seldin and Paul Epstein, *The Montessori Way* (2003) 246.
2. For a general discussion, see Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (1964).
3. [1] South Carolina Department of Social Services, Regulations for Private and Public Child Day Care Centers, April 1993, Chapter 114-503, paragraph C(1), p. 15.
4. [1] Tim Seldin, "Montessori Classroom Design," *Montessori Leadership* (Spring 2001),
5. .See Aline Wolf, *Nurturing the Spirit in non-sectarian classrooms* (1996).
6. Seldin and Epstein mention the subject on p. 250.
7. Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind* (1980).

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The classroom for those of three to six is not even rigidly separated from that of the children from seven to nine. Thus children of six can get ideas from the class above. Our dividing walls are only waist-high partitions, and there is always free access from one classroom to the next. Children are free to pass to and fro between classrooms. If a child of three goes into the room for sevens, eights and nines, he does not stay there long because he soon that it contains nothing useful to him. There are demarcations but no separations, and all the groups can intercommunicate.

Maria Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, (Clio, 1988) 207

Meeting Montessori requirements in the South African context Knysna Montessori School

Andri Nel-Rasmussen

Extract from Doctoral Thesis by Dr Andri Nel-Rasmussen entitled "*An Integrated Learning Programme for the Knysna Montessori School*"

Montessori schools are generally arranged in three-year age groupings. Each learner spends approximately three years within a particular environment, divided up into ages 3 to 6 year olds, 6 to 9 year olds, 9 to 12 year olds, 12 to 15 year olds and 15 to 18 year olds (Lillard, 2005: 20). The reasoning behind this mixed age group is to give the older learners the opportunity to teach and help the younger learners in the class, thereby revising the work they have already completed (Lillard, 1972: 75 – 76).

This also develops the sensitivity of the older learner to the needs and development of the younger learners, as their helping of younger learners may not infringe on the natural progress of the younger learners.

The purpose of the Montessori mixed-age groups parallels with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal learning. Vygotsky proposed that children learn at two levels. The lower level refers to what learners can learn independently and the higher level to what learners can learn with assistance. The difference between these two levels is referred to as the zone of proximal learning (Bodrova, 2003; Hamachek, 1995: 163 – 164). Both Montessori and Vygotsky proposed that through external stimulation learners develop more than if left to develop at their own pace.

In Montessori schools this external stimulation is both through the working with equipment, as well as social interaction (Seldin & Epstein, 2006: 80), while for Vygotsky learners are stimulated through constructive social interaction, either with an adult or an older classmate (Berger, 2005: 155; Ivic, 2000: 473; Hamachek, 1995: 165 – 164).

At the Knysna Montessori School, the classes are divided up into mixed-age groups. An overview of the age group and the comparison to the National Qualification Forum Band is presented in the Table 1 below.

At the Knysna Montessori School the age groupings are as follows (Beyleveld, 2009):

2 to 3 year olds (Toddler class): This class consists of a maximum of 16 children with one teacher and one assistant.

3 to 6 year olds (Pre-school including grade R): At the Knysna Montessori School, the 3 to 6 year-old group consists of three classes, each a maximum of 20 children. Each class is run by one teacher and one assistant. Children spend three years in the same group with the same teacher, progressing at their own pace.

Table 1: Overview of classes at the Knysna Montessori School

Knysna Montessori Classroom	NQF Band	Grades	Ages
Toddler class			2 to 3 year-olds
Pre-school		Ages 3 and includes Grade R	3 to 6 year-olds
6 to 9 class	Foundation phase of the GET band	Grades 1 to 3	6 to 9 year-olds
9 to 12 class	Intermediate phase of the GET band	Grades 4 to 6	9 to 12 year-olds
12 to 15 class	Senior phase of the GET band	Grades 7 to 9	12 to 15 year-olds
15 to 18 class	Further Education and Training Band	Grades 10 to 12	15 to 18 year-olds

6 to 9 year olds (Foundation, grades 1 to 3): The 6 to 9 year old class is considered as one class with a maximum class size of 60 learners (20 per learners per grade) with three teachers and one assistant.

Middlle School Businesses at Knysna Montessori School

However, the class is divided into three distinct areas, namely mathematics, languages and cultural studies (for more detailed discussion on the different areas in the classroom). These learners are divided into three equal register groups and move as a group from one area to the next. This arrangement was initiated to assist with general classroom management and to help the 6 to 9 year olds with order and time management.
This is not general Montessori practice, nor the ideal situation within the Knysna Montessori School (Beyleveld, 2009). As with the preschool class, the 6 to 9 year olds spend three years in the same class with the same teacher, progressing from grade 1 to 3 during this time.

9 to 12 year olds (Intermediate phase, grades 4 to 6): The 9 to 12 year old class can cater for 60 learners (20 per grade), with three teachers and one assistant. However, currently this class consist of 42 learners, two teachers and one assistant. This class is an open-plan class, divided into three areas. For administrative purposes, learners are divided into two register groups. However, during the work periods, learners do not work in their register groups, as in the 6 to 9 year old class.

12 to 15 year olds (Senior phase, Grades 7 to 9): The middle school of the Knysna Montessori School can cater for 60 students, maximum 20 per grade. Currently, the class consists of 39 learners. Teachers become more specialised in this age group, and there are currently seven teachers, some of whom teach both middle and high school classes.

15 to 18 year olds (Further Education and Training Band, Grades 10 to 12): During the high school years, Montessori schools become more traditional in their approach. The Knysna Montessori High School caters for 60 learners, 20 per grade. Currently, there are a total of 30 learners in the 15 to 18 year old class, with seven specialist teachers, some of whom also teach in the middle school. In preparation for the external examinations at the end of Grade 12, this class is run on a traditional timetable system, with very little integration between the different subjects.

From above, it is apparent that the Knysna Montessori School operate in a mixed age grouping in accordance to Montessori principles. However, as Knysna is a migrant society, learners move in and out of the Knysna Montessori School at different times. It is thus necessary for the school to assess learners, in line with Western Cape Education Department requirements, at grade levels.

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About the Author: Dr Andri Nel-Rasmussen is the Head: Academic of the Knysna Montessori School, where she has been a full time staff member since 2002. She completed her Doctorate degree at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, focusing on the development of an integrated learning programme for the Knysna Montessori Middle School, as well as the development of the adolescent and how it compares with Montessori's planes of development. She presented the findings of her thesis at the 5th International Conference of Interdisciplinary Sciences in Cambridge, UK in August 2010.

Note: This is to the best of our knowledge the first doctoral thesis on Montessori in South Africa. We hope to publish an interview with Dr. Nel-Rasmussen in the near future. Her thesis represents a coming of age for Montessori in South Africa, and can be accessed on the NMMU wesite via this hyperlink.

How are SAMA members applying the principle of mixed ages in their environments?

If you missed the cut-off for this newsletter but would like to share your experiences, and questions, or simply disucss this topic please feel free to do so on the Yahoo or FaceBook groups.

At New Beginnings Montessori we truly see the benefits of having a classroom of mixed ages, especially between our children of 2 ½ - 3 years and 6 years of age. We have very few 6 year olds as most parents prefer to send their children to a mainstream school at 6 years for Grade R to ensure a place for them in the very full Grade 1 government school schools. The few Grade R children that we do accommodate truly help towards building a community in our classes. I find that in my class of 2 ½ to 6 year olds, the youngest and oldest children tend to build good relationships. More particularly, I have found when having to settle into the new environment, the younger children find solace with the older ones. This is great for me as the beginning of a new year is always a crazy one, as we have many children that need to settle in and start the process of normalization.

Having a mixed age group helps this process, as you can give the older children responsibility to look after the younger ones and show them the ropes regarding toilet routines, where they need to put their belongings and general etiquette of the school. Through this, they are learning to be helpful, gain confidence, improve their self-esteem and later confirm their knowledge by helping the children with their activities. The younger children also now learn that they are able to interact with the older children and can find friends in them and learn to trust their peers. These observations have not been restricted to the above-mentioned age groups but have been the most profound to me. I find that the children aged between 3 ½ and 5 years are in the process of establishing group relationships and their place within these communities or clicks and therefore are more focused on what is going on in their circle.

Elfie Neethling

As we saw to be the case with the size of the classroom, so there is a "harmony of number: the possibility of best work is greater within certain limits of number". We can say that the limit might be about 40 0r 30 children.

The most striking is this curious fact: that the tendency of the teacher is to have few children in the class. It is though that if a teacher has only 5 or 6 children, it is better for the children. But we have abundantly experienced in many countries that when there are few children with one teacher, the result is a very inferior one … The number must grow, and the number of children must reach 25 or more to have success.

Maria Montessori,
27th International Teacher Training Course, 1940

Calendar

October 15
Gauteng South Sig: Creating a sensorial garden

October 22
Gauteng North Sig: Material making workshop

October 29
KZN Sig: Child health and first aid refresher

Survey of Resources : Class size, age groupings and adult:child ratios

Dr. Montessori deals extensively with the issue of multi age grouping and stresses how this is essential if one is to achieve the results she describes. It is not, however, a matter of having different ages together that is essential, but that this principle be applied within the Montessori prepared environment where the liberty of the child is respected. This relationship between the different principles is explained in her 1942 lecture "On the principles of the Montessori school" (Chapter IV in *The child, society and the world*, Clio:Oxford 1995.) Chapter 22 of *The absorbent mind* (Clio:Oxford 1988) is another good starting point to explore the importance of mixed age groupings.

A great deal has been written in support of different groupings in the third plane of development. Various NAMTA Journals have focused on this over the years and to get a full understanding it is probably advisable to follow the evolution of the discourse. David Kahn's article *Bringing the Montessori three-year multi-age group to the adolescent* (The NAMTA Journal 28.1. Winter 2003. 125-131.) is as good a place as any to begin.

Other resources on the Montessori approach to age grouping can be found in the article *Age groupings, class size and adult to child ratios above*, so I won't duplicate those here, but will rather focus on the resources outside of the Montessori community which underpin the efficacy of keeping children of various ages together.

Lillian Katz has written extensively on the benefits of the multi-age class and most of her work is available online. The report she co-authored with D. Evangelou and J. Hartman for the NAEYC entitled *The case for mixed-age grouping in early education* is a very useful research if you can track down a copy. Michelle Pancoe's "Thesis: Multiage" provides links to a variety of academic and colloquial resources. (http://multiageinfo.dnswh.com/thesis.htm)

As regards the non-graded aspect, Dennis Mulcahy Multi-age and muliti-grade: similarities and differences (http://www.mun.ca/educ/faculty/mwatch/win2000/mulcahy.html) is a useful resource. If you are still clinging to grade separations within a multi-age class, or are having difficulty explaining why Montessori classes should also be non-graded, then *Nongradedness: Helping it happen* (Technomic Publishing Co Lancaster, Pennsylvania. 1993) will provide a review of research and a rationale framed in conventional pedagogical terms.

The efficacy of small classes, even in conventional school contexts, is far from being conclusively validated. (See for example Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The science behind the genius.* 202) A report commissioned by the World Bank in 1978 showed that the connection between small classes and increased learning was not conclusive. (World Bank staff working paper no. 280. June 1978.). The passage of more than three decades has not produced more definitive findings, with the wide range of dependent variables in all studies yielding results to support either position. (See for example J. Grover and Russ Whitehurst. Center on Educational Policy. Class Size: What research says and what it means for state policy. (http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/0511_class_size_whitehurst_chingos.aspx)

Class size cannot be directly correlated with learning success in conventional schooling and as Montessorians we cannot justify smaller classes on the grounds that it is what is successful in non-Montessori contexts. What has emerged from studies on class size is that it is teacher disposition and pedagogy which are critical. Likewise in the Montessori classroom it is more likely the teacher's disposition, combined with an understanding of, and commitment to implement Montessori pedagogical practice which will determine the level of student learning.

Politano and Davis (Multiage and more: Building connections. Portage and Main Press. 1994 http://books.google.co.za/books.id+95IBA1d1TC0C), writing for non-Montessori readers, state something which might be obvious to Montessorians: "We used to plan starting with the curriculum; now we plan by starting with the children." This book is a valuable resource, highlighting the ways in which multi-age classes provide a built-in resistance to curriculum driven teaching.

SAMA Notes and News

Gauteng South Heads of School Breakfast

SAMA heads of school in the Gauteng South region found their African roots when they attended the annual Heads of School Breakfast. This year the breakfast was held at Moyo, Zoo Lake on a beautiful spring morning. Guests were asked to join in the African theme and add a Touch of Africa to their outfits. Most guests took advantage of the beautiful face painting that Moyo is so famous for and a long lazy morning stretched out almost to lunch time! Good food, beautiful surroundings and like minded company, what could be better! Thank you to SAMA for a lovely morning!

Kwazulu Natal Heads of School High Tea

Thank you so much to SAMA for allowing me to plan this lovely treat!

On Saturday the 11th September, the principals of KZN Montessori Schools from Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and as far afield as Hilton and Port Shepstone, took a break from their regular educational workshops and gathered to enjoy high tea at the elegant Oyster Box Hotel in Umhlanga. Nicky Rodseth explains "As educators and principals of Montessori Schools we're so blessed to be able to work with children- and educating little ones is important, life changing and not to be taken lightly. So it was wonderfully rejuvenating as fellow educators to relax with our colleagues and be "spoilt" by the wonderfully attentive staff, whilst enjoying a simply delicious tea on a beautiful sunny afternoon overlooking the sea-absolute heaven!"

After tea hotel management treated the principals to a tour of the hotel- they were shown the library (with its comfortable reading chairs, wood panelled shelves and wide range of books) the beautiful spa, restaurants and bars. High tea for Montessori educators could just become a tradition !

KZN Pictures by Angela Kelly and Nicky Rodseth

Photoes Far left from top☹
Gauteng South 1. Laurie Parr (The Little Star Montessori) & Charl du Toit SAMA President); 2. Nicole Cronin & Aadila Ismail (O'Summit) ; 3. Preshanie Bhagaloo (Teddy Bears Montessori) 4. Robyn Harding (Follow Me Montessori)& Anna Prentice (Seedlings Montessori 5. Ruwaida Manjoo (Sunshine Coast), Karen Moodley (Phoenix) & Mariam Amra (Wonderkids). 6. Chandra Vallabh – (Musgrave Montessori), Narvada Mahabeer (Great Heights Montessori & Ashna Devnarain (Sunshine Daycare Centre.)
Left: Shellaine Foggin (Hilton), Nicky Rodseth (Montessori Life) & Bhavna Nathoo (Mighty Minds).

Did you know?

The current regulations in terms of the Children's Act (38 of 2005) requires that children of three and four years of age be separated from children between the ages of four and six years. However the stipulation that this be done "where possible" has successfully been used to exempt Montessori schools from this requirement, and we do not know of any case (in South Africa) where Montessori schools have been compelled to separate their 3 and 4 year olds form 5 and 6 year olds.(
[Children's Act 33076 part 2 of 5. Government Gazette, 1 April 2010. 110-111.]

The Act, the Norms and Standards and the Regulations are currently under revision and SAMA has been able to make input recommending that this, and some other clauses which are detrimental to the provision of true Montessori practice be either reworded, or that Montessori schools be exempted from those clauses.

SAMA members will also be represented at a meeting with the relevant departments to discuss the reframing of the legislation during October. While there is no way of assuring that Montessori interests will be protected, we will be doing our utmost to ensure that critical Montessori principles are not threatened.

Western Cape Heads of School Breakfast

A pleasant morning all round in that we could relax with one another over a divine breakfast and share our common interests and thoughts, as well as receive advice from one another on management issues that appear common to all.

Thank you to SAMA for providing this very necessary time together. Not only do we learn from those who have been in the business for some time now but also love hearing the new ideas and different approaches to running a school.

When some of our own teachers wanted to apply the principle of one age for one class, it was the children themselves who showed what great difficulties sprang from this.

Maria Montessori
The absorbent mind. 205.

FOCUS FOR THE NEXT ISSUES

NOVEMBER

The Montesosri Materials
We are looking for articles on all aspects relating to the Montessori materials, including features, use and control of error.

DECEMBER/JANUARY

Back to School
Preparing your room; preparing yourself; helping children and their parents prepare.

Please help us to increase local content by submitting original articles about your school sand experiences.

Photos: Left: Shamiemah- Shereens & Elf, Bev – Childrens' Studio. Centre: Mariane - Somerset Montessori & Sally – Auburn House. Right: Claire, Jenni, Shamiemah, Bev, Jacky, Annette and Robyn.

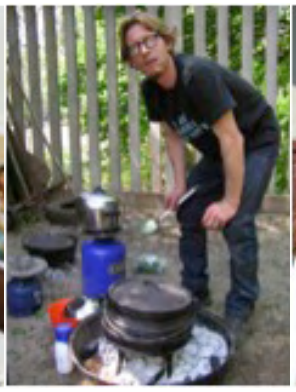
Hatfield Montessori Preschool 25 years celebration

We celebrated our 25 years with a reunion on Saturday 10th September.

It was wonderful to have some of the people present who were amongst the children attending in 1986. Beforehand news had also been received of the achievements of others who are now living further away. We also caught up with some who have moved away from South Africa. Past pupils also had an opportunity to speak and it was wonderful to gather together the memories that have stayed with them through the years.

There was plenty for adults and children to do and the current parents prepared food stalls of their traditional foods. So everyone could join in enjoying a "World Culinary Tour". The Storytellers were here with a story of Africa and the day ended with a drumming circle bringing everyone together.

Above: Drumming circle
Below: (Left to right) Lisede looking at albums, Kobus' potjie, 1986 students.



There are many things that no teacher can convey to a child of three, but a child of five can do it with the utmost ease. There is between them a natural "osmosis". Again a child of three will take an interest in what a five year old is doing, since it is not far removed from his own powers. All the older ones become heroes and teachers …

Maria Montessori
The Absorbent Mind (Clio, 1988) 206.

Grown-ups say the funniest things:

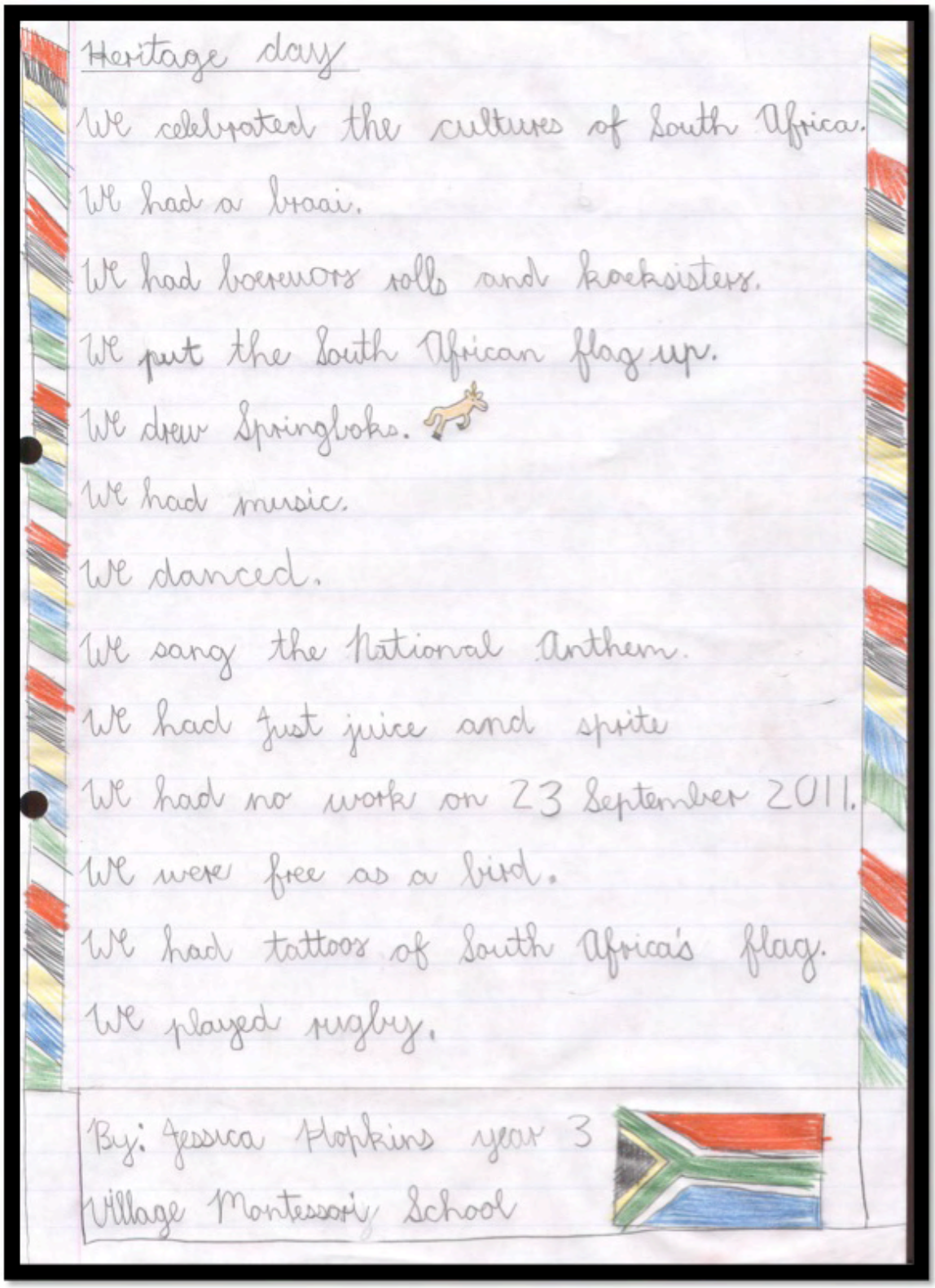
My father: "Do you do drawing with your children in MonTEEssori? Or is it not part of the terms and conditions?"

My mother: "Montessori isn't like Vodacom."

An elderly aquaintance: "This is Kate. She works in a Montessaurus school."

Kate Tolson

Heritage Day at Village Montessori School



Heritage day

We celebrated the cultures of South Africa.

We had a braai.

We had boerewors rolls and koeksisters.

We put the South African flag up.

We drew Springboks.

We had music.

We danced.

We sang the National Anthem.

We had just juice and sprite

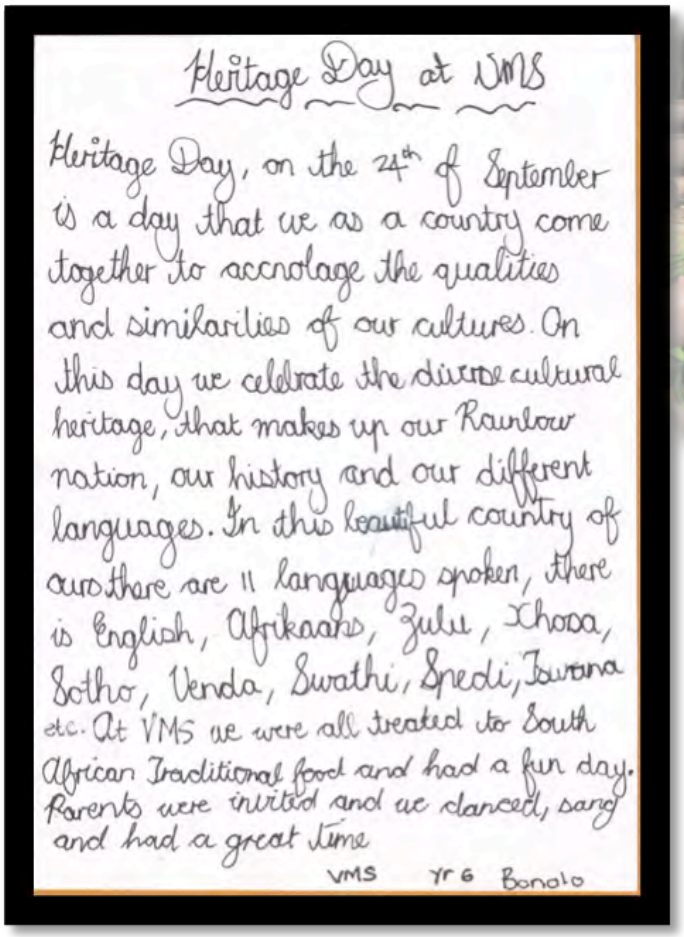
We had no work on 23 September 2011.

We were free as a bird.

We had tattoos of South Africa's flag.

We played rugby.

By: Jessica Hopkins year 3
Village Montessori School



Heritage Day at VMS

Heritage Day, on the 24th of September is a day that we as a country come together to accnolage the qualities and similarities of our cultures. On this day we celebrate the diverse cultural heritage, that makes up our Rainbow nation, our history and our different languages. In this beautiful country of ours there are 11 languages spoken, there is English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Venda, Swathi, Spedi, Tsvana etc. At VMS we were all treated to South African Traditional food and had a fun day. Parents were invited and we danced, sang and had a great time

VMS Yr 6 Bonolo

SHOWCASE YOUR SCHOOL IN THE SAMA NEWSLETTER

Send stories and photos to Irmgard or Sharon.

Book Reviews

Grow to live

By Pat Featherstone (director of NPO Soil for Life)
Photographs by Leah Hawker (Pat's daughter)

Reviewed by Jenni Petersen

√ Recommended for adults & as a classroom resource.

Publisher: Jacana Media ISBN: 978-1-77009-650-9

"In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." Pat Featherstone
In the foreword by the late Marie Roux, formerly of *Operation Grow,* we are reminded of how critical healthy food production is becoming to our communities: "The most important freedom is the freedom from want. Food comes first. There can be no lasting peace or security for anyone while hunger and poverty (and in their wake disease, frustration and degradation) stalk our land."

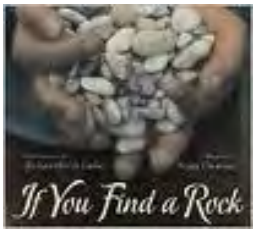
Pat has a solution. With a BSc Honours degree, a certificate in higher education and twenty years of teaching experience in biology, biochemistry, parasitology, animal diversity and evolution at secondary and tertiary institutions, Pat committed herself to pursuing her passion for the environment, and to helping people to help themselves to a better quality of life.

If you want to go on a fascinating journey of discovery about just how simple and enjoyable it is to establish and grow your own organic veggie garden, then this book if definitely for you & your school.

Choose between the smallest container gardens, or recycled tyre gardens; "ecocircles," or larger door-sized or trench gardens.

Pat's holistic approach includes a photo guide on *body stretches* for "preparing your body for digging, composting and planting," as well as a few *recipes* such as " Marula jelly", "Kei-apple jam" and "Waterberry and Mint Sorbet" from indigenous tree fruits. There is also a handy *vegetable planting guide* for Southern Africa in the back, as well as a varied and interesting bibliography/ recommended reading for enthusiasts.

If you find a rock



By Peggy Christian with photographs by Barbara Hirsch Lember

√ Recommended for ages 3 - 6

Reviewed by Sharon Caldwell

People who know me are aware of the somewhat stringent requirements I apply when choosing books for children in this age group. It is rare indeed to find a book of this caliber with its interesting text and exquisitely detailed photography which offer an aspect of the natural world to young children. Images of real children exploring rocks in a way that appeals to the sensitivities of this age ensure that this will be a firm favourite in any Montessori 3 – 6 room. Rocks are explored, not in terms of abstract classification but rather in terms of how the children themselves experience the shapes and colours, and in terms of what you can do with them (rolling, hiding, climbing). This book embodies an understanding of how children engage with the environment and invites children to explore rocks in a developmentally appropriate way. *If you find a rock* is published by Voyager Books © 2000.

This book is worth having for:

- a teacher's reference with a variety of applications for the outdoor and indoor classroom
- a reference for upper elementary children
- individual projects such as soil science/ water conservation/earthworm farm/compost heaps, etc
- learning to use/ re-use simple everyday items as gardening tools
- a whole school veggie garden project,
- a community outreach project,
- a home garden project

"A vitally important book, perfectly timed for the extraordinary times ahead. There should not be a household without one." Anthea Torr – editor of *Biophile* magazine

Sama Classifieds

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VACANCIES

Nutwood Forest Montessori Pre-school in Cape Town is looking for an experienced, dedicated, enthusiastic qualified Directress in our 3-6 environment for 2012. Please contact Joy on 021 4394874 and send your CV to nutwoodvp@mweb.co.za

We are looking for a motivated and reliable Assistant Directress in our youngest Class at **Honeycomb Montessori preschool,** Constantia. Starting in the new term in January, 2012. Please contact us by phoning (021)7943725 or email Annette@honeycombpreschool.co.za"

O'Summit Montessori in Bryanston is growing and looking for a qualified and experienced directress for 6 - 9 environment and a Head of School to oversee both preschool and primary divisions for January 2012. Contact Caroline (011) 706 8227 or email caroline@montessorischool.co.za

Village Montessori School in Centurion, Pretoria is looking for a vibrant, energetic and dynamic directress to join the Primary School team as soon as possible. Send your CV to: info@villagemontessori.co.za or contact Charl du Toit at 082 371 4476 or Daleen Koen at 012 664 2944

Urgent position available immediately at **Centurion Montessori School** in Gauteng for a Directress in our 3 - 6 year environment. Please contact Zinita/Cheryl on (012) 653-4177 or e-mail: school@centurionmontessori.co.za Send a short C.V.

Alex Blaikie Montessori School in Bloubergrand Cape Town is looking for a dedicated, energetic and dynamic assistant for our small intermediate 3-4 year class. Please contact Bronwyn 021 556 8564

Blue Moon Montessori School has an immediate opening for one preschool assistant, another assistant for 2012, and one 6 to 9 directress for 2012. Please send C.V to bluemoonmontessori@telkomsa.net

Knysna Montessori School is looking for a Directress with strong language skills in their 6-9 year environment for 2012. Please send a CV to admin@knysnamontessori.co.za or call Dawn on 044 382 5316

SAMA PRODUCTS

SAMA Recommended Curriculum – an integration of A Montessori Recommended Curriculum with the Revised National Curriculum Statement. For queries and to order, contact the SAMA office. The curriculum is printed and bound, and is available to paid up SAMA Institutional Members for R250.00 and to all other categories of membership for R1000.

SAMA Policies and Procedures CDs – a comprehensive compilation of government laws, acts, and policies on CD 1 and examples from various Montessori schools and resources to use in school management on CD 2, at R50.00 each. These prices are for school members only. All other categories of membership may purchase the CDs for R500 per set.

SAMA Parents Handbook – a full colour, beautiful publication, useful to parents as an introduction to Montessori Education. This booklet covers basic Montessori philosophy and is the ideal starting point for parent education. These handbooks are available to SAMA School Members only at R25 per copy. For orders of 30 or more, additional postage will be added.