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Message from the President

By Charl du Toit

I had a teacher who always told us that we have two eyes and one mouth, meaning that we should observe twice as much as we comment. These words have often entered my mind in the Montessori class, as it has been difficult for me to talk less and look more (you do know that teachers love to hear their own voice!)

In this month's issue we will be focusing on observation.

Observation is a skill that all Montessori adults need to acquire to help follow the child. This does not mean that once a week we take out a pencil, paper and clip board and sit quietly in the corner making notes. It should be a natural process, a part of your daily tasks in class. Through observation you will notice the slightest changes in each child and you will be able to eliminate any distractions in class, you will be able to foresee difficulties and be on the lookout for any problematic situations.

Observation is the core tool Montessori gave us, and just like her, we need to become the scientist who observes and then experiments and records changes in the environment. Through observation we become aware of and in touch with the child.

While our colleagues who are following public school terms are talking about their holiday that is around the corner and SAMA is working hard on their new structure, I would like to encourage you to become more observant, not just in the class, but in your daily

life as well. I am looking forward to seeing you in September when we have our special meeting in Gauteng.

Regards,

Charl

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When educating our Children's brains we should not neglect to educate their hearts

~Dalai Lama

Montessori Experiences

By Luzaan Roux

How did my four years at Montessori College influence the person I am today? Well, everything I learned and gained there has definitely carved out significant stepping stones in the process of discovering who I am as an individual.

Initially it felt like I was being thrown into the deep end of the pool, having to adapt to a whole new system of learning and studying. But, over time, just like every new challenge in life, I began to swim stronger and stronger until, gradually, I slipped into the flow of things. This was no easy task of course, but what in life is ever easy? Thus, from the very start I learned that if one just keeps going, one will get past the obstacles. This came in handy throughout my first year at the University of Pretoria and as tough as it was, I had confidence in the perseverance that I had developed while attending Montessori College. I proceeded to graduate with a degree in English Studies within three years.

The Things Children Say...

By Kate Tolson

I was busy with Conor and the false fatigue was suddenly upon us. Four-year-old Amaan working behind us was somewhat disgruntled by the disturbance, and I could hear him mumbling under his breath, "people carrying on like lunatics..."

I worked in a Montessori classroom deep inside a mainstream school. One day I asked four-year-old Nazranah to fetch the other Montessori children for lunch. They were all out in the garden that we shared with the mainstream nursery and reception children. Nazranah took one step outside the back door and bellowed: "*Smack time!*"



Maria Montessori a lifetime dedicated to understanding the inner evolution of the individual

The people I met throughout my time at Montessori College also play important roles in the process of growing up. Not once did I feel I had to become someone I was not to fit in. From the beginning, I was accepted for who I was and not judged about what I looked like or where I came from etc. This was a significant factor that allowed me to begin the process of figuring out who I am and what I potentially could offer to society one day.

These are the essential aspects I learned after attending Montessori College. Even now, after my degree, I am still learning new things about myself, and I know I have only just begun scratching the surface, having tons more to discover as I enter the working world.

In conclusion, I became an independent student throughout my years at Montessori College, and that skill proved itself quite valuable to me not only in university but in most, if not all life situations so far.

"When we learn to stop,
we begin to see,
and when we see,
we understand.

Peace and happiness are the fruit of that.
In order to be with our friend,
a flower, or our co-workers,
we need to learn the art
of stopping."

~Thich Nhat Hanh, The Art of Living

Snippets from my teaching days

By Cané Lake

Cycle of Activity

While observing at the Inanda preschool in Johannesburg in 1983, when I was a student doing the course upstairs, we were given 'observation' homework. One of them was to observe a cycle of activity. How fortunate I was to observe a 3 year old come into school, pee in her panties, take them off and wash them, hang them up to dry, and at the end of the morning, iron them, and then put them back on. And repeat it all the next day...for a week! She obviously needed something dirty to wash!

An 8yr old child in my class with cerebral palsy, who used crutches, used to motivate the other children in their work, by saying: Come on, try! I try!

CEO's Report

Sharon has been very busy since the conference. In May she met with Lynne Lawrence, Executive Director of AMI where a discussion was begun regarding possible collaboration between SAMA and AMI. This was just an exploratory discussion about where AMI is going and ways in which SAMA members might benefit. The SAMA Exco has authorised the CEO to continue to explore this without any commitments at this stage.

She also attended a week-long conference on the rewriting of the Children's Act. This is the legislation that governs all Early Childhood Centres and thus has an impact on most of our member schools. As always, Social Development welcomed SAMA's presence and input. Hopefully our input will be taken into account in the new drafts of the legislation and regulations. As the process is still in its early stages, we will monitor developments to safeguard member interests.

A number of meetings were held between the Gauteng JLC and the Gauteng education department, including one focussing on the regulations that govern the

Overheard in the classroom

Two 6 year old girls were arguing about God:

First Child: God is in here (*pointing to her heart*).

Second Child: No, God is all around (*making sweeping movements with her arms*).

First Child: No, God is in here!

Second Child: No, God is all around!

In walks Third Child: No, God is Allah! The other two looked at each other, and walked off – end of argument.

"When dealing with children there is greater need for observing than of probing"

~Maria Montessori

registration and monitoring of independent schools. This impacts on members that have primary and high schools. There are a number of issues in the draft regulations that could have negative implications for Montessori (and other alternative approach) schools. We have been assured that our concerns will be addressed. As with the Children's Act regulations this is just the start of the process so a great many stages have to be completed before the regulations are promulgated, and NAISA will support us in any areas where our rights are not recognized.

The main focus for SAMA over the next few months is the writing of a new Constitution and the development of a strategic plan for moving forward. The CEO will be working on this as well as the development of a new logo and updating the SAMA website, both of which have been approved by the ExCo and budgets allocated.

Sharon Caldwell will be out of the country from 27 June until 14 July, but will arrange to have emails forwarded for any urgent business.

Bringing AMI Training To South Africa?



Childrens' Campaign Trust (CCT) is an organisation run by Peter Williams to assist many NGOs in the Western Cape – working with women and children at risk.

CCT runs a number of Montessori schools in the Cape Town area under the umbrella name of Montessori Connect, viz Childrens' Workshop (Claremont, Cape Town), Nutwood Forest (Green Point), Newberry House (Somerset West), Montessori Connect Sunridge, and working on starting another in Table View soon. A portion of the profits made by the Montessori Schools go towards CCT and the organisations it supports.

Montessori Connect schools would like to ensure that their directresses have access to the best possible Montessori training, and to this end, recently invited Lynne Lawrence from AMI to visit them and she came for a week during May 2012 and met with Montessori Connect, SAMA and a few other Montessorians and Educationalists in the Western Cape.

Montessori Connect is working with AMI with a view to hosting AMI Primary (Elementary) training in South Africa, and would like to ensure this is as accessible to all in South Africa, not just for Montessori Connect staff. If you are interested in attending the course or finding out more about it – we would like you to indicate your interest to us.

We are still working on logistics, timing and costs, etc but in order to understand the requirement for AMI Pre & Primary training in South Africa, we would like anyone interested in doing AMI training to send an email to info@montessoriconnect.co.za with the following;

Name:

Email Address:

Current School:

City/Town:

Cell number:

please mark which you are interested in:

I am interested in doing

AMI Pre-Primary and/or

Primary Training –

please mark which you are interested in.

Please note that by indicating your interest does not in any way oblige you to attend any course, it is really an information gathering process to see if it will be feasible to run the course in South Africa.

By: Judy Brower

"If we wish to observe the child, we must observe. If we see that he is working with great effort and difficulty, and if we see that it takes him a long time to do what we could do very easily; then we are observing. That is the observation. If there is a difficulty that is perfectly apparent to us, but which the child does not see, we leave him thus. That is our observation."

Maria Montessori, Some Suggestions and Remarks upon Observing Children. Course 1921, Lecture 3.

The Experience of Observation

"The first step to take ... is to shed omnipotence and to become a joyous observer. If the teacher can really enter into the joy of seeing things, being born and growing under his own eyes, and clothe himself in the garment of humility, many delights are reserved for him that are denied to those who assume infallibility and authority in front of a class."

~Maria Montessori. To Educate the Human Potential.



Observation is not the experience of sitting back hoping to see something or sitting on the side of the classroom looking in. Observation is in fact very active participation with the child, we are engaged with him. That doesn't mean we are interrupting the child working with the materials, or directing his activities or even talking to him. It means we are sitting quietly to one side of the environment and watching what the children are doing. The participation we are involved with is quite active therefore we need to be present. Present physically, mentally and emotionally where the child is the focus and not what we should cook for dinner or processing what happened during the morning staff meeting. When we become interested in that which we are observing, we are lead to transformation.

We observe constantly. Our bodies are designed to observe all the time. It is an involuntary action, like breathing. It just gets done. We are constantly taking in information through our senses. Our brain processes the information and then stores it and acts on it.

The experience of observation is automatic not unlike the new born baby who is totally absorbed in observing the environment and continues to bring in sensory information again and again. The child between 2 and 4 years starts to verbalize what they are observing while the 6, 7 and 8 year olds argue with each other as to the meaning of the observations they make or their interpretations.

Observation is a habit which must be developed through practice. As Montessori Guides we need to develop the spirit of the scientist. What is it about children I am fascinated by? What do I want to know about that particular child, area or group?

"This idea, that life acts of itself and that in order to study it, to divine its secrets or to direct its activity, it is necessary to observe it and to understand it without intervening – this idea, I say, is very difficult for anyone to assimilate and to put into practice."

~Maria Montessori. The Montessori Method.

"Become interested in the idea that "life acts of itself." For those who are interested, "such interest is the motive-power which creates the spirit of the scientist [In] the teacher interest in the phenomena observed will be the center round which her complete new personality will form spontaneously."

~Maria Montessori. The Advanced Montessori Method I

How to Observe

Our culture does not encourage the restraint of good intentions. When we feel we can help someone in need or offer assistance, we are encouraged to do so. But so often, when it comes to the developing child, these same impulses serve only to interfere with the child's natural development.

When the child is struggling to button up his shirt, we feel the impulse to use our own hands to help fasten the buttons. This does not help the child rather it hinders his development. We recognise that if the proper preparation has been done, if the hands have adequate muscular development and the fingers dexterity, then what we see as a struggle is actually helping the child. It gives him an opportunity to apply his developing skills, to exert his will upon the world and see that he can accomplish something. Dr Montessori realised that it was these "struggles" that free the child. And yet we intervene again and again. We can't seem to help ourselves.

Montessori saw this unnecessary intervention often in teachers. She realized that specific training in learning to control the impulses driven by these good intentions was needed. It is that internal discipline, when practiced by the adult, which offers so much to the child.

Follow this exercise regimen to strengthen *your* ability to control these impulses and by so doing, be of greater assistance to the child.

"We are so accustomed to abandoning ourselves to our own impulses. We are so convinced that our actions are always useful to others. We are so certain that we can do well that which others do badly; so sure that we can perfect that which is imperfect. Because in this world these impulses are considered good impulses, we have never performed exercises in order to control them."

~Maria Montessori

One: Sit down. Look at the clock and commit that you will not get out of the chair unless there is imminent injury or gross destruction.

Two: Be silent and motionless: "...the first thing the teacher has to learn is to master herself, and to remain motionless beside the child."

- Restrain yourself from speaking, commenting, showing approval/distress, or responding verbally or non-verbally in any way.

"Show no manifestations of enthusiasm, pleasure, or joy."

Three: Observe one child but keep your peripheral vision open to take in the overall events of the room. Focus on one but remain conscious of the rest.

Four: Take notes. These are for your own reference but it provides a visual cue to the children that you are working and, thus, deserve the same respect that you offer them when they are working. You have permission to focus, to concentrate, to be absorbed by your work.

Five: Observe yourself as an observer. Are you struggling to stay in the chair? Not to intervene? Don't be afraid to look within and see your own defects.

- How often you need to restrain these impulses?
- Is there a sense that you will be able to somehow fix the perceived difficulty?
- Were there any situations in which you felt compelled to intervene and did they resolve themselves without your intervention?

Daily observation, like daily exercise, nutrition, or meditation, is a gift to our well-being. It strengthens our own inner discipline. It frees us to slow down, to enjoy the children around us. As the children start to normalize by concentrating, socializing and being joyful we see that our work is of great value.

3 Stages of Observation

Stage One – Perceptive

Accurately watching and recording the facts as they occur naturally.

“It is necessary that the teacher put herself into immediate relation with the truth, by means of rigorous observation, that she should strip off all illusions, all the idle creations of the fancy, that she should distinguish truth from falsehood unerringly.”

~Maria Montessori. Spontaneous Activity in Education.

Stage Two – Interpretative

Think about what has been seen and try to identify the needs. Interpret the observations rationally within the context of the environment, culture or the child’s life.

Stage Three – Contemplative

Choosing how to fulfil the needs and actually doing so. Reflect on your observation and yourself as an observer.

What to observe in the child

“When you are in a Casa dei Bambini to observe



children, you are working and laboring to learn something which I do not give, which an assistant does not give, which no one else gives...If you do not possess this capacity, this sensitivity which permits your learning the intimate facts which the children reveal without warning anyone as to which is an important thing or which is worthy of claiming attention, then this sensitivity, this capacity of observation is the labor which you must accomplish in yourself.”

~Maria Montessori, 1913

These ideas are merely a starting point...

Developmental milestones

- Cognition, language, social/emotional growth, motor skills
- Independence, concentration, self-discipline, coordination
- Wonderment, socialization, morality
- Trust, self-expression, commitment

Learning

- What are they working on? How long?
- What choices do children make?
- Use of work plans (elementary)
- Research skills (elementary)
- Collaborative, cooperative learning

“[The] teacher must prepare herself, not by means of the content, but by means of the method ... the fundamental quality is the capacity for ‘observation’; a quality so important that the positive sciences were also called ‘sciences of observation’ ... Now it is obvious that the possession of senses and of knowledge is not sufficient to enable a person to observe; it is a habit which must be developed by practice.”

~Maria Montessori. The Advanced Montessori Method

Regional Meetings

Gauteng South – Harmony in the Classroom with layout and colour

Isabel van Zyl shared her insights into optimal ways of utilizing your space. When space is poorly designed children rely on the teacher for direction. When a space is well designed children have more opportunities for self-directed exploration and the teacher's role becomes supportive.

Judith Colbert said “You know when you are in a well-designed environment, you don't want to leave. Purposeful, engaging, and beautiful environments blend and balance the best elements of home, school, and community life together. The environment is warm and inviting, there are endless possibilities for inventing and creating”

It was a valuable experience for all who attended and gave us many ideas to enhance our environment.

Well organized space

- Has open pathways that lead to a point of interest.
- Offers freedom of movement between points of interest.
- Is arranged according to specific classroom goals.
- Results in teachers being able to support the children.

Poorly organized space

- Dead spaces encourage wandering and unruly behaviour.
- Pathways that lead nowhere or interfere with play already in progress.
- Results in teachers having to police the children.



Image sourced from internet

LAW DISCUSSION FOR PRE-SCHOOL OWNERS AND PRINCIPALS

Topic: Labour Law and Related Labour Issues at Pre-Schools
Presented By: Jessica Venn of Venn Attorneys
Hosted By: Christine Young of Rainbow Babies & Kids Nursery School
Charge: None – Free of charge

Christine Young of Rainbow Babies & Kids Nursery School is hosting an open law discussion for pre-school owners and principals. Jessica Venn of Venn Attorneys will be discussing labour law and related labour issues at pre-schools.

The discussion will be informal and pre-school owners and principals are encouraged to raise labour related questions and share their experiences to create a learning environment for everyone.

The discussion will be on Thursday 19 July 2012 at 14h00 and will end at 16h00. Snacks and refreshments will be provided.

Details of discussion:

Date: Thursday 19 July 2012
Time: 14h00 – 16h00
Venue: Rainbow Babies & Kids Nursery School,
107 Mount Street,
Bryanston

To reserve your seat at the discussion, kindly email Christine at rainbowkids@mweb.co.za or Jessica at jessica@venn-attorneys.co.za on or before Monday 16 July 2012 (two days prior to the date of the discussion).

Kindly take note that Rainbow Babies & Kids Nursery School and Venn Attorneys reserve the right to cancel or postpone the discussion. Participants will be given reasonable notice of cancellation and/or changes in date and time.

For more information regarding the discussion please do not hesitate to contact Jessica at 082 371 2548 or jessica@venn-attorneys.co.za.

We look forward to seeing you there!

“we will help you protect your rights”



Vacancies

Western Cape

A position has become available at Children's Campaign Trust/Connect for an experienced 3-6 trained Directress or a 6-9 trained Directress for a 6-9 environment. From Oct 2012 / Jan 2013.

Please contact: admin.cc@mweb.co.za

Gauteng North

Village Montessori School in Centurion, Pretoria is looking for a Montessori Directress or student in Elementary training to join the Primary School team (6 - 12yrs) as from September 2012.

Send your CV to: info@villagemontessori.co.za or contact Bhavna Bhagattjee at 012 664-2944

Gauteng South

Nurture & Nature Montessori urgently seeking a Qualified directress to teach ages 18months - 3 years as of the third term (September), we are in the Fourways/Douglasdale area. Contact Lee-anne Myerson Principal at Tel: 011-705-3170 Mobile: 072-296-4407 or send your CV to lee-nne@nurtureandnature.co.za

From the Office

Payments

- Payments received in the SAMA bank account without supporting documentation are:
- R300 received 6th February from Veronica Kraft
- R300 received 20th February from Claase Claassen
- R300 received 13th March from C Louw
- R864 received 7th May from unknown.

Please contact Irmgard on
041-367 4936

Conference 2013

Cape Town - plan now!

28th & 29th April 2013

Management training: 30th April 2013

The SAMA office will
be closed from the
25th June until the 13th
July 2013

SAMA Member Suppliers

Grace Educational Equipment

P O Box 2567, George, 6530
IC Weltevreden Plaas, Glentana
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Cell 072 351 7279
Email: info@gracemontessori.co.za

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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 normally available to SAMA School Members at R25 per copy. The Handbook is now available at a special price of only R5each plus



postage costs.
