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ASSOCIATION****Aug/Sept 2011***Message from the President*

Montessori designed her approach to aid child's concentration and development. When this way of teaching is followed a number of problems disappear - such as those children who so often is labelled with concentration problems.

The three hour uninterrupted work cycle is one of Montessori's fundamentals which make us different from the traditional schools. It has two components, the class and the individual. The class should be a three hour work cycle without interruptions such as specialised teachers to come in to do e.g. music which can result in a lack of focus and concentration. The individual needs to be assisted guided and given presentations which link to the materials, so that the child can focus on what he is doing.

Being a traditional teacher it took me some time to get used to the idea that a child could work for three hours uninterrupted. But all traditional teachers will admit that you get more work done in a double period than two single periods. My biggest problem when I implemented this was to stay focused for three hours myself, as I was guided by my tummy which wanted something to eat and drink no later than 10:30 in the morning. Thank goodness for snack time! But this was also taken advantage of by the children who took excessive time to go snacking. Again I did the wrong thing by setting up rosters for snacking, but it still did not help.

Eventually I gave up. I allowed the children to take responsibility for their own snacking and continued guiding the children in the class, working with the individuals, and focussed on what each child's strength and interest was. Once this was done a lot of my problems disappeared. They wanted to finish their work to show the others and I received work of a higher standard. Creative writing became books of ten pages and more, Suddenly there were not enough math cards in the class and cultural work blossomed into power-point presentations better than I could do.

I fell in love with the three hour work cycle. It is the most relaxed quite time of the day in my class without interruptions. I actually get time to focus on the individual and to observe the children to see where I can guide or assist. The key of implementation was in the name- **uninterrupted** -with individualised purposeful stimulating work where children have three hours of open, uninterrupted time to choose independent work, become deeply engaged, and repeat to their own satisfaction.

**FOCUS OF THIS
ISSUE****The uninterrupted work-
cycle in the Montessori
environment**

Have you joined
the SAMA Yahoo
Group and
FaceBook pages?

Go to the SAMA
Website and click on
the appropriate icons
for the networking
option you prefer.



YAHOO!
Groups

Protecting the Three-Hour Work Cycle

Maren Stark Schmidt

One of the key components of an authentic early childhood Montessori classroom is each child's creation of personal three-hour work cycles. A work cycle consists of choosing an activity, doing it, achieving some internal satisfaction, returning the activity to original order, followed by the selection of the next activity.

The Montessori classroom is a vibrant and dynamic learning environment, with each child selecting his or her activity, doing it, and returning the activity to the shelf. After successful completion of a task, there is a period of self-satisfaction and reflection, and then the child chooses the next activity.

Montessorians call this rhythm of activity a work cycle. Stephen Covey, in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, refers to the habit of a work cycle as creating an upward spiral of growth and change. Covey describes a dynamic process of "learn-commit-do" that empowers us to move toward continuous improvement, both as children and adults. Montessori saw the three-hour work cycle as a critical vehicle for aiding normal development in the human being, a process Montessori called normalization.

Three-hour work period allows for a three-hour work cycle. A three-hour work period is a protected work time where the children in a Montessori early childhood classroom can complete multiple work cycles, eventually creating a three-hour or longer work cycle. Children, as well as adults, develop concentration in two basic ways: 1) doing a series of short activities for longer periods of time, or 2) doing one activity for successively longer durations.

The Discovery of False Fatigue.

Traditional preschools are structured around 15 to 20 minutes activity periods based on the observation that children of three, four and five years of age have a 15 to 20 minute attention span. What Dr. Maria Montessori discovered through observation, and we can replicate this with our own note taking, is that given a consistent uninterrupted three-hour work period, young children will choose three or four familiar activities, each lasting 15 to 20 minutes each and then enter into a period of restlessness, which Montessori called false fatigue. In traditional schools this is when recess is scheduled.

Dr. Montessori noticed if the adults working with the children waited out this period of false fatigue, which lasts ten to fifteen minutes, the children will select an activity that constitutes challenging work or new learning, and concentrate on that activity for an hour or more. Dr. Montessori noted that at the end of the three-hour work cycle the child experiences a period of calm and sociability.

Once a child has developed a morning three-hour work cycle, children as young as three or four-years-old will begin a second work period in the afternoon. Adults,

elementary students, and teens, may have developed two, three, or even four three-hour work cycles in their day. Another later phenomenon of the work cycle is that the older child's concentration level begins at the point where false fatigue initially began and that concentration level may be maintained over three hours. This ongoing development of concentration can be observed and charted.

Three Key Components of Authentic Montessori Classrooms

1

Well-trained Montessori teachers, certified at age level being taught

2

Specially prepared environments for each three-year stage of development

3

Children's free choice of activity within a protected three-hour work period

Example of a child's work cycle.

A four-and-a-half-year-old's three-hour work cycle might look like this:

- Work puzzle, 10 minutes.
- Build with blocks, 15 minutes.
- Water plants, 20 minutes.
- Sweep floor, 10 minutes.
- Walk up and down steps, 5 minutes (false fatigue)
- Prepare and eat snack, 15 minutes
- Visit with classmate, 10 minutes.
- Do 100 piece puzzle, 45 minutes.
- Practice tying shoes, 45 minutes.
- Help younger students put shoes on, 15 minutes (Period of sociability)

Completing a three-hour work cycle gives the child, or adult, a sense of accomplishment followed by calm composure, along with the desire to do more work. The three-hour work cycle may be a misnomer in the fact that we need to have more than three hours of time to contain the work periods. Having a safeguarded three-and-a-half to four-hour period is recommended.

Example of an adult's work cycle.

Here is an example of an adult's three-hour work cycle on a Saturday morning.

- Check schedule. See that the morning is free until 1 pm.
- Clean kitchen, 15 minutes.
- Start laundry, 15 minutes.
- Make phone calls for appointments, 20 minutes.
- Vacuum, 20 minutes.
- Feeling of restlessness, What to do next? (False fatigue)
- Cup of coffee, 10 minutes.
- Balance bank statements, pay bills, 90 minutes.
- Fix lunch, 15 minutes. Eat with family and visit 30 minutes. (Period of sociability.)

Adults, as well as children, benefit from a protected work period. Due to various circumstances, some Montessori schools do not offer a three-hour work period for the children. These schools may have good programs without a three-hour work cycle, with happy children and families, but I hope this article would help school administrators, teachers and others understand that protecting a three-hour work cycle for their children can help their programs go from good to great.

What keeps a school from offering three-hour work periods?

The factors that keep schools from offering a three-hour work period are numerous. Some obstacles are inherent in the structure of our schools, in the preparation of the teachers, and in the readiness of the children.

School Factors

In established schools, the three-hour work period may have been whittled away due to a variety of factors that range from having specialists come into the classroom, meeting childcare licensing

What you can do to help create three-hour work periods:

School Administrators:

- Create schedules and policies that support three-hour work periods
- Create opportunities for open dialogue in your school community about best practices

Teachers:

- Have faith in the child to construct a work cycle if given the time,
- Observe the child at work
- Recognize false fatigue
- Avoid predictable daily activities, such as snack time, story time, etc.

Parents:**At School:**

- Make sure your child arrives on time ready to choose an activity
- Make sure absences are limited and adhere to your school's policies

At Home:

- Create predictable three-hour blocks of time for your child to create a work cycle

requirements, trying to serve lunch to the entire school, having policies that are lenient on tardiness and absenteeism, running two or three day a week programs, or offering morning or afternoon only programs.

Using Specialists.

Special instructors for art, music, physical education, second languages and more, who come into the classroom and instruct the entire class, interrupt the work cycle. Or perhaps the entire class moves out of the classroom to art or music room, gym or language or computer lab, thus disrupting the children's work cycles. If specialists are used, try to schedule their sessions at the beginning or the end of the three-hour work period.

Another possibility is to make the specialists' time in the classroom a free choice activity, which can flow into each child's work cycle by using a "necklace" approach for art or music lessons. When the art or music teacher is available an announcement is made and special necklaces are placed in a basket or on a hook. If a child desires to go to art, he or she takes a necklace and goes to the lesson. The art or music teacher gives individual or small group lessons in the art or music room. The teachers give lessons and the children come and go as they finish their activities, replacing their necklace to signal lesson availability to other children. A child might choose to spend a few minutes in a lesson, or create an individual three-hour work cycle in the specialist's lesson.

Using specialists in a Montessori school is a response to creating consistency in a learning component in which the school's teachers may feel inadequate. Granted, we can't expect every teacher to have an expertise in art, music, dance, and our school's second language. Using specialists in the classroom as a free choice activity, where the classroom teacher can also choose to join in, can help teachers learn new skills and become confident in becoming the well rounded generalist that will help our teachers create an uninterrupted work period in their classrooms.

Also, using specialists in the classroom may have started due to requests from parents to offer these enriching subjects. In our schools, we need to ask ourselves—administrators, teachers, and parents—does having specialists truly serve the needs of our children? If so are we using our specialists in the best way to serve the needs of the children? Do specialists enhance or hinder the child's development of a three-hour work cycle?

Childcare Licensing.

Some states' preschool licensing requirements are such that facilities must offer a rest time and outdoor time if the children stay over three hours a day. Many childcare licensing programs require that outdoor time be offered before lunch instead of after lunch. These situations create difficulties in scheduling a three-hour work period. School administrators should visit with childcare licensing agents and explain the workings of a three-hour work cycle and request special needs in the school's licensing requirements.

Lunch jams.

Larger schools have difficulty getting lunch served and start serving lunch at 11 am or earlier in order to get everyone fed. Some schools have remedied this by eating lunch in their classrooms, or by extending their half-day program to include lunch. A lunch routine that includes the entire community allows the children to have time to enjoy the sociability that is an aftereffect of completing a three-hour work cycle.

Policies on tardiness and absenteeism.

Many children don't get a three-hour work cycle because they arrive to school late, have excessive absences, or leave before the end of the school day. Private school administrators report that the average rate per student for tardiness is five times or less during a 180-day school year. The absentee rate is less than 10 days per school year and early dismissals are five or less per year.

When rules on tardiness, early dismissal and excessive absences are not monitored or enforced, a school may experience five to ten percent of its population involved in escalated tardiness and absentee rates; for example, tardiness in excess of 90 times per year, more than 40 days absent, and early pick-ups of 90 times a year. These children do not get a consistent three-hour work period, but also disrupt the workings of the classroom and prevent other children from creating a successful work cycle. Make sure your school has enforceable expectations about tardiness, absences and early dismissals.

Two and three-day programs.

In response to parent requests over the years, many schools have two or three day a week programs. Children in two and three day a week programs have difficulty creating consistent three-hour work cycles, and attaining the levels of concentration and independence seen in students in five-day a week programs. If at all possible, a school's program

structure should encourage all students to attend five days a week.

Afternoon preschool.

Numerous schools have inherited morning and afternoon preschool programs based on what public schools offer in their areas. Time blocks might look like this, and don't offer a possibility of a three-hour period:

Morning session from 8:30 am to 11:00 am.
Afternoon session from 12:30 pm to 3:00 pm.

Running a morning and afternoon program can be financially advantageous to a school and in high rent districts may be essential for the school's viability. In addition, many families enjoy the flexibility that an afternoon preschool option gives them. If running morning and afternoon sessions are essential to your school's sustainability, work to lengthen each session so that there is time for a three-hour work cycle to be developed.

Alertness and the ability to learn new things are

strongest between 8 am to noon because of factors such as circadian cycles and blood sugar levels. Our programs need, whenever possible, to help our children take advantage of this natural learning time.

Preparation of the Teacher

As well as internal policies within a school structure, there are factors inside the classroom that can make it difficult to create a three-hour work period.

Teachers. If the school administration doesn't safeguard the three-hour work period and doesn't have a policy to train and help teachers create three-hour work cycles for each child, a teacher may or may not have the understanding, ability, or opportunity to create a three-hour work cycle in his or her classroom. Also, some Montessori teachers report that the importance of the three-hour work cycle was not emphasized in their training.

By not having a three-hour work cycle, a teacher may observe the children having the initial work period leading up to false fatigue. The restless period of false fatigue is noisy and chaotic. Most of us would happily

Normal Development or Normalization

By observing human behavior, Dr. Montessori gave us a scientific method and basis for understanding positive and normal human development. When watching normal development we see these four attributes:

1. Love of work or activity
2. Concentration
3. Self-discipline
4. Sociability seen in joyful work, mutual aid and cooperation.

These four characteristics in a person's behavior provide the evidence that natural or normal process of human development, or normalization, is occurring unimpeded.

When normal development meets an obstacle, the human being's natural tendencies for work, concentration, self-discipline and sociability become misdirected, affecting mental, moral and psychological growth. This misdirection leaves the personality weakened and unstable and allows detours, or deviations, to occur in a person's character development. These diversions to normal development will be seen as behaviors that include but aren't limited to the following: timidity, need to be entertained, indolence, fantasy, laziness, passivity, lack of focus, capriciousness, disorderliness, violence, rage, possessiveness, disrespect and disobedience.

The child's work in a three-hour work cycle strengthens the child's personality and becomes the healing agent.

Joyful work is the main sign of normal development.

send the children outdoors. Sending the class out for recess at this moment, though, destroys the second and most important part of the work cycle, where the child initiates true and new learning.

A teacher or school administrator, seeing this false fatigue, may think having a recess or giving more lessons are the keys to restoring order in a classroom. If we observe the children during this period of restlessness, we should see that in less than 15 minutes the children beginning to choose personally challenging work. With our observations, we should see that the children do not need a break, or more lessons. Instead, the children need the luxury of the time in a three-hour work period to increase concentration and independent skills.

School administration should help their teachers understand and protect three-hour work periods for the children. Teachers should work with school administration to establish sustainable policies and practices for creating and maintaining three-hour work periods. Parents should encourage the establishment of policies that protect three-hour work periods for every child.

Child Readiness

Even when school administration, teachers and parents work together and develop strategies to protect three-hour work periods, the children themselves can create an obstacle to success.

Obstacles for the Child. When a child is undergoing some emotional stress of which there may be many causes—personal illness, family turmoil, moving to a new house, or a new sibling, to name only a few—concentration within the child may diminish and a sort of agitation may settle over the child, preventing the child from establishing a productive work period.

The obstacles that prevent a child from being ready to tap into the success cycle of choose-commit-do are varied as the individuals that make up your school community. This is one reason that the teacher's observation of the children at work is so essential to the workings of a Montessori classroom.

Obstacles that can prevent the creation of a successful work cycle can be divided into two basic categories:

- Difficulties that are external to the child
- Internal factors, such as personality, knowledge, experience, attitude, character, etc. create other obstructions.

External factors. A child may be unable to create a work cycle due to allergens in the environment, illness, learning or perceptual differences, hearing, vision, diet, sleep, changes in routine, visitors in the house, family member out of town, death in the family, birth of a sibling, arguments in the family, along with excessive television viewing or playing of video/computer games.

A child's personality can affect his or her ability to tap into a work cycle. Being an optimist or a pessimist is a factor. A child with an optimistic perspective is more likely to finish or resume a difficult task, whereas a pessimistic child might give up too easily. Being an introvert or an extrovert contributes to the development of concentration and independence. An introvert, on one hand, may quietly focus on an activity. Concentration, on the other hand, may be a problem for the introverted child who reverts to daydreaming. The extroverted child may be more concerned about visiting with classmates, but may be more willing to choose personally challenging work. This is where the art of observation helps in creating a work cycle.

The point of development a child is on the human growth continuum affects his or her work cycles. Children who are not developmentally ready for a certain Montessori learning environment may flounder in the incorrect setting. For example, a two-and-a-half year old may or may not be ready to join a Montessori early childhood classroom, depending on language and movement development. A six-year-old may or may not have acquired the psychological characteristics of needing group work to learn, a trait necessary for success in a Montessori elementary class, in contrast with the need of the three to six-year old for individual work. At each point of development, the human being taps into a work cycle in differing ways.

Too many new students.

When a classroom has more than one-third of its population as new students, the new comers disturbances can diminish the work cycle of the other children. The older children in a classroom, for example, the four and five-year-olds in an early childhood classroom, provide a stabilizing foundation for the three-year-old beginners to develop a work cycle. The older children who have a three-hour work cycle contribute significantly to the success of the beginning three-year-old.

A key concept for a well working Montessori classroom is to have a three-year age span within the group, with one-third of the group being one age. Therefore, the early childhood classroom is for three to six year olds; lower elementary is for 6 to 9 year olds; upper elementary is for 9 to 12 year olds; adolescent programs are for 12 to 15 and 15 to 18 year olds.

There are many obstacles to creating a three-hour work cycle for our children. When obstacles are eliminated, we see the levels of the children's concentration and independence rise. As the work cycle lengthens, teachers, school administrators and parents report happier and sunnier dispositions in their children.

Creating Solutions

How can our schools and classrooms create, maintain and protect our children's three-hour work cycles?

To protect three-hour work cycles, it is vital that all adults—school administrators, teachers and parents—work together to prepare an environment where each child can create personal activities that lead to every individual's normal and natural development of concentration and independence.

All school community members need to work together to remove the obstacles encountered in creating and safeguarding three-hour work periods for our children.

To carve out the necessary time our children need, we must continually reassess the way we schedule our school day and our specialty classes. We need to carefully observe our children at work and play in order to recognize and remove obstacles to their development.

What we all desire for ourselves, namely, not to be disturbed in our work, not to find hindrances to our efforts, to have good friends ready to help us in times of need, to see them rejoice with us, to be on terms of equality with them, to be able to confide and trust in them – this is what we need for happy companionship.

Maria Montessori,
Dr Montessori's Own Handbook,
(Bently, 1966) 79



By working together--school administration, teachers, and parents—to ensure a three-hour work period for every child, we can take our children, our families, our classrooms, our schools, and our world, from good to great.

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About the author:

Maren Schmidt, an AMI trained elementary teacher, founded and directed a Montessori school. Maren currently writes the award winning newspaper column, *Kids Talk™*. She is author of *Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents*, and *Building Cathedrals Not Walls*. Contact her at Maren@KidsTalkNews.com. Visit www.MarenSchmidt.com.

The uninterrupted work cycle in elementary

by Tim Seldin

A mother posed the following question on an online discussion group:

“My children are part of a public Montessori that is a school within school. It has been proposed that their uninterrupted three hour morning work time be replaced with their specials - art, library, music, and physical education. They would have an uninterrupted work time in the afternoon instead. Could you please give input and any support material I could use to support the uninterrupted morning as opposed to afternoon work time.”

There is actually some debate about how sensitive elementary children who have grown up in Montessori are to interruptions.

Certainly I have found no reference in Montessori's writing to this specifically at the elementary level. But common sense kicks in here to help one analyze this question.

The issue of whether an uninterrupted work period should be in the morning or afternoon has to do with whether the children in question are most focused and alert at one time of the day over the other.

We know that children under age six tend to become tired and less focused in the afternoon. At least in general this is the case. Likewise, studies are showing that many adolescents are at their worst intellectually in the morning, and show definite improvement in the afternoon and evening - again in most cases. Elementary children do not seem to show a consistent pattern - some seem to do better at one time of the day, others are the opposite, while still others seem to be more or less the same all day long.

The basic advice behind this is to consider why an uninterrupted work cycle is considered important, and then, if one **has** to interrupt the children at some point in the

day, choose to protect the time when they seem to be the most focused and alert.

The second issue here though is freedom of choice. Ideally in all Montessori, children follow their hearts and interests, only controlled by rules pertaining to maintaining health, safety, and the general peace of the community.

Establishing any sort of schedule is fine, so long as it is completely up to the children whether to participate. If their attendance is required, that is where one drifts away from the freedom of movement and honoring of children as independent human beings.

School is not a factory, children are not employees. Despite the attitude of some educators and parents, they should not have any quota of work output.

The issue is not whether we care about their learning - oh we definitely all care. But the wise educator, or at least the authentic Montessori educator, understands that our job is to inspire a sense of wonder, to nurture children's curiosity and imagination, and to awaken their spirit as human beings. We cannot hurry love. We cannot force lasting learning and creativity. We can only watch, wait, and continue to encourage and entice. Why then do we think it is important to require children to attend classes, rather than to create resource centers and people trained in their use in which children can do art, music, Spanish, exercise, and so on when the moment is right?

There is nothing wrong with telling a child that something is essential - but only when it is truly important, because mandating things tends to engender resistance. Why not say to children, exercise is important. You need to do it for at least this much time every day, week, whatever... Choose from among these activities. Choose when you will do it. Group experiences are offered at these times. Attend if they interest you. The gym (just as we do with libraries) is open between this time and that

Survey of Resources : Uninterrupted work cycle

The most extensive discussion of the work cycle and the consequences of interruptions can be found in Chapter III of *The Advanced Montessori Method, Vol. 1*. Both the Clio and Kalakshetra versions have Dr. Montessori's original work curve drawings which are omitted from the current reprints of this work published under its original title ***Spontaneous Activity in Education***. It is the first figure in the section entitled "Whole class at work" that shows the length of the cycle – from 9 am to "10 - 10 ½ -11 (also 11½) that clearly shows how it is the period **after** false fatigue that gradually extends and leads to serenity. The importance of a thorough understanding of the curves of work used by Dr. Montessori to illustrate this chapter cannot be over-estimated.

Another good explanation of the importance of uninterrupted, freely chosen work can be found in Chapter 7 or ***The Child in the Family***.

The concept of the uninterrupted work cycle is best addressed in the context of related principles of the free (spontaneous) choice of activity within a prepared environment, and an appropriate application of the principle of non-intervention.

Other articles of Interest

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*If in the period of "false fatigue" at 10 a.m. an inexperienced teacher, interpreting the phenomenon of suspension or preparation for the culminating work as disorder, intervenes, calling the children to her, and making them rest, etc. their restlessness persists, and the subsequent work is not undertaken. The children do not become calm; they remain in an abnormal state. In other words, if they are interrupted in their cycle, they lose all the characteristics connected with **an internal process regularly and completely carried out. The characters of all children change in this environment where they can work without being disturbed, and they become calm and able to concentrate.***

Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method* (Kalakshetra, 1965) 81

SAMA Notes and News

CALENDAR

September 10
Head of School Functions
 Gauteng South, KZN &
 Western Cape

September 17
 Gauteng North SiG

October 15
 Gauteng South Sig

October 29
 KZN SiG



KZN REGIONAL MEETING FEEDBACK

Our Saturday SIG meeting was a HUGE success, the ladies had so much fun making materials, everyone stayed till 12pm! It was a lovely opportunity for everyone to chat and get to know each other while they made materials together.

GAUTENG SOUTH REGIONAL MEETING FEEDBACK

“The third Gauteng South SAMA meeting was built around the theme “Think Pink”, in keeping with the guest speaker, Larne Neuland’s philosophy on positive thought. Larne was inspirational in her message, and I believe that all who attended left with a more positive outlook on life and with the tools to teach emotional intelligence to the children in their schools.”

Caroline Bergman. O'Summit Montessori

WESTERN CAPE REGIONAL MEETING FEEDBACK

Even with the long weekend we had a good attendance. Susanne generously shared with us her research and notes on the “reading brain” informing our directresses of the importance of the early influence from birth to 6 years, of all the necessary steps in wiring the brain towards good reading for later learning.

HAVE YOUR SAY

The topics for the next few editions of the SAMA newsletter will be drawn from the Statement of Principles adopted at the 2011 AGM. These Principles will be used to inform whatever instruments SAMA develops regarding Best Practice and Quality Assurance.

In order to take members’ wishes into account it is imperative that we hear your voice - not as rumours and hear-say but in the context of open dialogue that can be kept on record and taken into consideration when Exco drafts its proposals for the next AGM.

There are a number of venues where this discussion can take place – the Yahoo Group and the SAMA facebook page are the easiest and most obvious, but you can also submit articles to the newsletter, or simply send an email to sama@samontessori.org.za.

OBITUARY

GRACE
IDI

Babongile Grace Idi was born a Zulu princess, Great Grand daughter to King Senzangakhona, Son of Shaka Zulu, in 1967, in Kwazulu Natal. However she was raised in Thokoza, where from an early age she taught her family to read. She later married Emilio Idi and together they started Villa Montessori Pre-Primary School, in 1999.

She was an inspiration to many, always having a smile on her face, seeing only the good in young and old. Greeting the children with a kiss on the head, she was a second mother to many. The parents were welcomed by her warm and gentle demeanor and were comforted knowing their children were in good hands. She loved being on the playground watching them play and making up stories and seeing them grow. Even after graduating they always had to come back to see Teacher Grace and show her how well they were performing at school!

She is quoted as saying "I live for the children, they are my life" - Indeed Grace was a wonderful wife, great mother, true teacher, and outstanding friend. She loved her God, her own children and family above all, sacrificing everything for them.

Sadly she was diagnosed in October 2010 with cancer and lost her fight on Tuesday 16 August 2011.

Her golden Heart has stopped beating; her gentle hard working hands now rest. But we know that God has chosen her because he only takes the best!

She leaves behind her husband Emilio, daughter Rita, son Giovanni, nephew Nkosinathi and Niece Nokthula, and will be missed by family, friends and all the children.

Grace our lives will never be the same, you have touched those you know with your Grace and your love. We will never stop missing you, we Love you (Mama, Honey, Teacher) Grace.



Did You Know?

AMI/USA requires a morning and an afternoon uninterrupted work cycle for 3-6 and 6 - 12 groups. They stipulate that at elementary level "Out of a possible ten work periods per week, nine must be reserved for Montessori work." The AMI standards are uncompromising regarding interruptions and extracurricular activities: "Extra-curricular activities such as physical education, music, foreign languages, and art, scheduled at fixed hours outside of the classroom, disrupt the children's individual rhythm of work and hinder the development of concentrated work, which is one of the key elements of normalization."

Source: ami-school-standards-7092.pdf accessed via Google. Downloaded 23 August 2011.

Holes : Louis Sachar

Reviewed by Katinka Steyn

✓ Recommended for ages 9 - 12



This powerful book was first published in 1998 in America and depicts the experiences of a boy, Stanley Yelnats IV, who was sentenced to hard labour at “Camp Green Lake” for a crime he did not commit.

There are three stories woven into this one book. Stanley, after a lot of struggle and bad luck, eventually gets to redeem the curse which was visited upon his great-great-grandfather and all the Yelnats family after him, by Madame Zeroni. This is the ‘origin’ of the story.

A first love gone wrong prompts young Elya Yelnats to leave Latvia and look for fortune in America – forgetting all about a special promise he had made to Madame Zeroni.

The second strand of the story centres round the young, overweight Stanley IV and his experiences in juvenile detention. Used to being bullied and bossed around, young Stanley gradually becomes physically, emotionally and psychologically stronger – learning to deal with hardship on levels he had never before experienced, and forming strange bonds with even stranger characters.

Here starts story number three. Stanley’s best ‘friend’ at Camp Green Lake, Zero, runs away after being mocked and being discriminated against. Stanley, like a true friend, goes to help and stumbles across the mysterious story of outlaw kissin’ Kate Barlow. This is an intricate story. There are a lot of characters spread across the generations. Their paths cross and re-cross brilliantly. And who should end up at Camp Green Lake with Stanley, but Zero, real name Hector Zeroni, great-great-great-grandson of Madame Zeroni. Perhaps Stanley can render some service to Hector which will redeem the ancient curse of the Yelnats family?

This story addresses many issues of our time. Discrimination, racism and poverty are but a few of these. This book lends itself to open and honest discussion about right and wrong – one of the Sensitive Periods of the Elementary child. Literary tools such as similes, figurative speech, humour, satire and sarcasm are used with great success in this novel and give the child a clearer understanding of the purpose of such tools. This novel had my 9-12s on the edge of their seats, begging me to continue reading for hours on end. I highly recommend “Holes”, especially as a group reader in order to invite discussion and explanation

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Implementing an uninterrupted three-hour work cycle – SAMA Members' experiences

Photos courtesy of Blue Moon Montessori School.

Kym van Straaten (Owner/Head, Randburg Montessori School)

We have always aimed at following authentic Montessori practice at our school. This naturally included the principle of an uninterrupted three hour work cycle. Therefore our work cycle ran from 9 – 12 daily including free movement indoors and outdoors. I eventually realized, however, that we weren't very good at following the "uninterrupted" part of the principle. Our work cycle included extras. Extras like music, computers, art, movement, karate, soccer and so on.

Even though these are constructive activities, in their own right, they were interrupting the three hour work cycle. As the "extra" providers arrived there would be enthusiastic responses such as: "look, computer lady, yay!" This was always shouted with joy, which of course broke concentration – for children who were going to the activity and for those who were not. After careful observation, recording and then reflection on these occurrences, we realised we were not complying with the basic principle of the uninterrupted work cycle. Our children were not able to achieve deep concentration. What they were achieving in place of true involvement in self-chosen activity was great "occupation".

To make matters worse, many of these extras providers arrived near "false fatigue" time. This resulted in us very often breaking instead of pushing through as we knew we should. The reality we realized, was that we were struggling to achieve normalisation by following authentic Montessori in all aspects. Because normalisation, as we all know, is a product of deep concentration. So what to do? How do we lose the extras that parents want and the children seem to enjoy?

We decided to juggle our extras. All the providers were very accommodating. It was a choice of changing times or not coming to our school anymore (which was bad for their business).

Our work cycle is now 4 hours from 8 – 12 still following an open door system. We have arranged that our extras come after lunch at midday. Only



Photo Courtesy of Randburg Montessori

one "extra" provider comes at 11h30, which still allows for an uninterrupted 3 hour cycle. This has made a huge difference and we are getting unbelievable results - good work, deep concentration and yes, the long awaited normalisation.

Ruth Hodgkinson (Directress, Randburg Montessori School)

With the new uninterrupted work cycle children are doing more productive work. They choose their own work to a greater degree also. We have seen more children becoming normalized. Even children who previously showed no interest in work are now working with interest in what they are doing, and for much longer periods.

We have found we need to balance between indoor and outdoor time by ensuring we have an adult able to supervise while children are outdoors. During this time (usually 11 -12) we find some children inside working. This almost invariably includes children who don't normally settle down to work. They come in while it is quieter and they have the class to themselves. They then choose an activity and concentrate for prolonged periods.

Many of the older toddlers come to the casa group during this quieter time.



Jacky Price (Owner/Head, BlueMoon Montessori School)

Creating a work cycle does have its challenges and often over the years I have had to keep adapting to various school's perceptions or time tables to try to fit this in. All I can genuinely say is that once in place, a three hour work cycle, is worth every effort and adaption. Children have a sense of a coming change to the programme and this prevents them from settling into concentrated work. The one most disruptive factor to the work cycle that I have observed in schools is the break for group snack time. This also prevents the children from self-regulating their own needs and against Montessori principles.

Our solution here is to have individual snack.

Depending on number of children in your classroom, set up a separate snack table, ours is a round dining room table cut down to children's height which then sits 7 children at a time. The fruit is cut with the 2 children and a directress each morning, and then placed into covered containers. Savoury biscuits and spreads are also set out. The children use tongs to serve their fruit. We have 7 plates therefore, after each child has snack they need to wash their plate and return it to the snack shelf.

The benefits are all Montessori goals for our children. We also have orange squeezing, breakfast cereals and carrot cutting as well as access to drinking water throughout the morning. The challenge is the cleanliness of the process, but still worthwhile.

Constant sat down with his needle and began threading. Three-year-old Alexandra took a sewing activity and sat down beside him.

As she did so, she gazed round companionably and remarked thoughtfully, to no one in particular, "it's like a little table with people sewing."

Kate Tolson

Another negative action is the interruption of work at fixed times in the daily programme.

Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, (Henry Holt, 1967) 241



Jenni Petersen (Stepping Stones Montessori Pre-school)

At Stepping Stones we embrace individuality and so each directress (six classes) may operate according to her individual style and interests, as long as it is in keeping with Montessori philosophy. Almost all the children move on to mainstream schools, and an element of preparation for mainstream school is kept in the daily routine.

Children start arriving in the mornings from 07:45, and they play outside until 08:30, or may start working in their classroom. Everyone comes inside at 8:30 and some classes start with a morning ring for about 20 minutes, which includes taking the register, changing the date and weather, and singing songs. Some days the morning ring includes either news/ show and tell, theme introduction, or a library session. Directresses are flexible and may do ring time later in the day to incorporate the above. Children start work period after ring time and until 11:00, when all children go outside to run, play and socialise. At 12:00 the children return inside for the last 30 minutes of the day, which includes a fresh fruit snack, a story, relaxing music or anything the directress would like to

talk to the group about.

We work according to the needs of the children in our own respective classes. For example, some directresses use part of the work period on one day to garden, whilst others introduce musical instruments, or focus on art, gross motor, baking/cooking or ball skills; or activities and games which may spontaneously be introduced if the children become restless on long rainy days. Each class experiences each of the above activities, but at the directress' discretion. The children who are engrossed in an activity complete their work before ending the work period even if it means 'going over time'.

Each class experiences an interruption during work period once a week for 30 minutes when a drama session takes place with a specialist drama teacher. We find that when there are interruptions, it can be challenging to direct the children back to their work, and full concentration is often not achieved; although the interruptions are seen as important.

When the children have an uninterrupted work-cycle and everyone is focused, we often find ourselves standing back and observing the children, and we find it encouraging watching them work continuously and at peace.

The characters of all children change in this environment where they can work without being disturbed, and they become calm and able to concentrate.

Maria Montessori,
Education and Peace, (Clio Press, 1999) 79



Three-year-old Katie was chomping her snack garishly on her first day in our class. A rather pointed silence fell over the table as everyone else regarded her.

Eventually, four-year-old Alexandra said, with her usual tact, "Someone's eating with their mouth open."

Kate Tolson

Focus for the next issue:

Class composition: Ages, size and ratios.



Articles are contributed by SAMA members. We would love to hear from our readers. Please send interesting snippets, valuable insights and amusing anecdotes to share with others and help make this newsletter an exciting and interesting one. If you would like to contribute, please send to Irmgard at admin@samontessori.org.za

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BEDFORDVIEW PROPERTY AVAILABLE – IDEAL FOR SETTING UP A SCHOOL

I am looking for a buyer for a property that is situated at 13 Grobler avenue and extends up to 123 Van Buuren Rd (the original address) in Bedfordview Johannesburg. The property is situated in the middle of the block and is surrounded by residential properties. It is ideal for a pre-primary or primary school. There are 4 horse stables (it is zoned agricultural). There is also a 20 meter swimming pool that was obviously designed for training.

The property is 8570m² in extent and boasts some magnificent trees. The buildings were designed by a prominent architect of the time (Mr. Van Achterberg) Despite it's dilapidated state it was valued by an independent registered evaluator (documentation is available). Developers want to flatten the buildings, remove trees and dismiss that which could truly be great value to the community in the form of a school.

All interested parties Kindly contact Helene Langlands on Cell: 0828326371 or Theo on cell: 0826636635

VACANCIES

Montessori Eersterust Pre-school has a permanent position available for a Directress/student directress in the 3-6 environment. Please send your cv asap to eleonor@montessorieersterust.co.za / cell: 083 501 8874 / Fax by email: 086 742 9227 ASAP. Position to be filled from 01 September 2011

Lynnwood Park Montessori in Lynnwood Glen, Pretoria requires a Montessori Directress for a 3 - 6 year environment from October 2011. Contact Jany Landsberg 083 592 1581 to arrange an interview.

Carefree Kid's Montessori School, is looking for a Montessori qualified Teacher/Directress for their 3-6 environment. Please send CV to info@carefreekids.co.za or contact Melinda on 012 348 7099 or 083 632 9175

The Montessori in Hermanus (Hermanus Private School) has 2 permanent positions available: The School Head and a Directress in the Senior Primary environment. Please send your CV asap to brennan@hermanusprivateschool.co.za (082 896 4343) or fax 086 6050 415. Positions to be filled from 01 January 2012 or sooner.

The Beehive in Stellengerg Durbanville, has a position for an experienced, qualified Montessori directress for our 3 – 6 class. Requirements: Montessori Diploma 3 – 6 yrs, plus 2+ year's experience as an assistant or directress. Starting January 2012. Email your CV to beehive@telkomsa.net or contact Carol on 021 919 4223.

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.

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