



# National Newsletter

## Southern African Montessori Association

February 2009

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### Message from the President:

Dear SAMA Members,

The theme for the upcoming conference is exploring inclusion and one of the ways we can all do this is by working together to serve the children in our communities – regardless of where these may be across our region.

As Montessorians, we do sometimes protect ourselves within our own ideologies and are occasionally criticised by others in the world of education as being aloof, closed off to other ideas and quite dogmatic in our approach. It was with this in mind, as well as the theme of our conference, that I suggested the theme for this newsletter – Montessori in a Global Community and Alternative Approaches to Education.

As Montessori schools we are often compared to Waldorf schools and other alternative approaches to education. It is important that we are aware of what these other schools offer and learn to explore our similarities and respect our differences. I hope you will find the information in the newsletter informative and thought provoking.

On a more serious note, Gayle Thompson (ordinary member on Exco from the Western Cape) has resigned from the SAMA Exco. Gayle has been predominantly responsible for getting the conference off the ground and thankfully has a wonderful sub-committee in place to continue her hard work in this regard. On behalf of the Exco, I would like to thank Gayle for all of her dedication, commitment and contribution to SAMA in the 10 months that she has served on Exco.

Please remember to renew your SAMA membership during the coming month as membership expires on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009. We value and appreciate your continued support.

Warm Regards

Sam Streak

**"Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it."**

**- Marian Wright Edelman**

## We are here to serve the Child – Each and Every One in our global community by Sam Streak

In preparing this newsletter with the theme of the global community of Montessori, I came across the following excerpt. It offers us a reminder that the work we do each day, no matter where we are or under what circumstances we work, should always be about serving the child. Perhaps it is this simple reminder that can help all of us stay focused on the child and use this as our common ground at all times. And through this, perhaps we will begin to acknowledge the work that each of us does – whether it is in the suburbs, in a township, in a rural community, in Africa, in Europe or the United States. We are all servants of the child – every child.

“Montessori is a lonely practice, even for the teacher surrounded by good friends. In each moment, we are self-questioning. In each moment we are asked to surrender ourselves for the sake of the child. What of us is left?...By embracing our unique role in the classroom, by seeking more dearly the shadow of the child in which we hide ourselves, we are connected to the tens of thousands of Montessori pilgrims in their own classrooms throughout the world. We may be isolated, but we are working together toward a different world that will spread far beyond the walls of our classroom.

The great painter signs her name inconspicuously so as not to detract from the subject of her work. But brushstrokes are still there. Even the unsigned masterpiece betrays the name of its creator. Likewise, our children are our great work, our brushstrokes visible long past when they have left us. The art is not about us, but it reveals us still. Our goal is not the coloured canvas but the emotion it evokes when we have long since put down our brushes.

This teaching is a lonely practice. Our communion is found in our art.”

Excerpt from Chapter 42 in *The Tao of Montessori* by Catherine McTamaney (2005) Published by iUniverse, Lincoln, USA.

(This book is available online from [www.loot.co.za](http://www.loot.co.za) and is a wonderful source of inspiration for Montessorians).

“When the child goes out, it is the world itself that offers itself to him. Let us take the child out to show him real things instead of making objects which represent ideas and closing them up in cupboards.”

María Montessori



## CONFERENCE 2009

Dear Members

In preparation for the annual SAMA conference 2009, we are putting together a power point project which will photographically depict nurturing aspects of our schools



If you feel that you have a special something in your indoor or outdoor environments that have the aesthetic qualities of supporting the spiritual child, please send photographs to SAMA administrator, before 1 June 2009 (admin@samontessori.org.za

Of examples that come to mind...a quiet garden bed for contemplative thought, a shell wind chime, a hand embroidered cushion, a welcoming path, a mosaic paving stone, a curved wooden window frame, an inviting creative writing table. Those are some ideas, what do you have that creates beautiful spaces for your children? Share and inspire others.



## BOOKINGS FOR THE CONFERENCE

Your full booking pack, including the relevant form, will be available by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 when bookings for the SAMA conference officially open. For now, we can reconfirm the following details so that the necessary budget, travel and accommodation arrangements can be made.

Dates for Conference: Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July to Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2009

Dates for Management Training: 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> July 2009

Venue: Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Mowbray (Old Mowbray Teachers Training College)

Keynote Speakers: Barbara Isaacs and Berhane Dory

Early Bird Rates will apply 31<sup>st</sup> March to 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009 R600 for SAMA Members; R270 for SAMA Student Members and R1200 for non-members. For one-off day attendance, the rate will be R300 per day for SAMA Members and R600 per day for non-members.

Late Registration Rates will apply from 16<sup>th</sup> May to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2009 R800 for SAMA Members; R360 for SAMA Student Members; R1600 for non-members. For one-off day attendance, the rate will be R350 per day for SAMA Members and R700 per day for non-members.

In order to qualify for SAMA Member rates, membership must be up to date and renewed for 2009/2010 membership year.

New and renewal membership forms for 2009/2010 are available on the SAMA website [www.samontessori.org.za](http://www.samontessori.org.za)

## Global Montessori Organisations and Associations (Compiled by Sam Streak)

In my experience, there is so much value in keeping abreast of what is happening in the Montessori world – across the globe. For the past two years I have represented SAMA at the AMS Annual Conference where the Global Forum initiative has proven to be very successful. I have learnt about Montessori's explosion in China, and the long term development of projects in places like the Ukraine, Uganda and many other places.

Memberships to overseas organizations is expensive but one idea is to get together with other schools in your area and perhaps each join a different organization and share information with one another. Of course, we hope your SAMA membership gives you a lot to work with!

Attending international conferences definitely offers inspiration so if you are planning to travel, it is always worthwhile to check out possible seminars or conferences. To help you, I have simply compiled a list of the various organizations and their websites. They are not presented in any order of preference nor reflect any personal affiliation. The list is simply intended to be an easy reference.

**AMI (Association Montessori Internationale)** was established in 1929 by Maria Montessori and was guided for more than 50 years by her son and close collaborator, Mario M Montessori. AMI's objective is to uphold and safeguard the quality of Montessori training and the passing on of Maria Montessori's heritage through her educational philosophy and methodology, including the materials and their presentation. AMI's headquarters are in Amsterdam. [www.montessori-ami.org](http://www.montessori-ami.org)

**AMS (American Montessori Society)** is a non-profit education society founded in 1960. Its purpose is to help children develop to their fullest potential through the educational principles of Maria Montessori. This includes developing Montessori programmes, accrediting schools, encouraging research, organizing seminars and symposia and all other areas which relate to the dissemination of Montessori philosophy. [www.amshq.org](http://www.amshq.org)

**IMC (International Montessori Council)** is a world-wide umbrella organization of Montessori schools and the men and women who lead them, own them, or serve on their boards. Its focus is on issues of concern to Montessori school leaders: administration, curriculum development, recruitment and hiring, supervising teachers and staff, insurance, finance, facilities, working with boards, recruitment, building community, fund raising, public relations, and so forth. [www.montessori.org](http://www.montessori.org)

**NAMTA (North American Montessori Teachers' Association)**, an affiliate organization of AMI was founded in 1970 as an organization of Montessori teachers, administrators and interested parents throughout North America. Its purpose is to maintain Montessori traditions and, at the same time, to be on the cutting edge of innovative education. [www.montessori-namta.org](http://www.montessori-namta.org)

### **Other international Montessori organizations and associations:**

Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand (MANZ) [www.montessori.org.nz](http://www.montessori.org.nz)

Montessori Australia Council [www.montessori.edu.au](http://www.montessori.edu.au)

Montessori Europe [www.montessori-europe.com](http://www.montessori-europe.com)

Montessori Schools Association (UK based) [www.montessori.org.uk/msa](http://www.montessori.org.uk/msa)

Montessori China [www.montessori.org.cn](http://www.montessori.org.cn)

# Montessori Classroom: Three Before Me

From the NAMC Blog site <http://montessoritraining.blogspot.com/>

Posted by Michelle Irinyi on Friday 17 October 2008.

*Submitted by Joanne Schimper*

After I completed my Montessori training, I was filled with wonder and excitement. I was eager to have my own Montessori classroom filled with normalized children who chose their own work, begged for more lessons, worked quietly and respectfully, joyfully cleaned up after themselves, and didn't interrupt. Now I'm not saying that didn't happen, but it probably wasn't to the extent I had hoped for.

One of the most difficult tasks I encountered was children interrupting while I was presenting a lesson. Thinking they were just unaware of how to ask for help, I decided to hold a class meeting on what to do about the constant stream of interruptions of children asking for help. What came out of that meeting surprised me. They did know what to do.

"Miss Michelle, if we have a question and you are in a lesson, we should look for Miss Jen. If Miss Jen is speaking with a student, we should silently touch her on the shoulder so she knows we are waiting."

I even asked them to demonstrate this by role modelling. It was beautiful! We agreed together that this was the right approach and that we would start this method back up right away.

Naively, I thought I had the situation well under control. Wrong!!! My very next lesson, I had at least three students interrupt my presentation. That afternoon, I sat and observed students interrupt my assistant while she was working with other students. Puzzled, I went back to my manuals and reaffirmed that the best way to ask a Montessori teacher for help is to quietly approach and place a hand on her arm or shoulder (or for older ones, to simply wait quietly nearby). I also reread the sections on peer mentoring in the multi-age classroom.

Next, I went about conducting some observations in different Montessori classrooms in my school. This method seemed to work very well in the 3-6 classrooms. Children were respectfully waiting by their teachers' sides until they finished working with others. There was still some of that happening in the lower elementary (6-9) classrooms, but when I got to the upper elementary (9-12) classrooms, it was as if this practice was no longer necessary. Disenchanted, but not discouraged, I set about trying to figure out what to do.

I stumbled across an audio tape of a seminar given at a Montessori conference in Chicago on classroom management and expectations in the Montessori classroom. As I was listening, the speaker addressed exactly what I was experiencing in my own upper elementary classroom (and later, my lower elementary classroom). Children were constantly interrupting teachers giving lessons. It was then, that I learned about "Three Before Me".

Children who are not yet normalized are used to going to the teacher first for help. What surprised me was that children who were "raised" Montessori, also started going to the teacher first. After hearing about "Three Before Me", I called another class meeting. This time, I shared my observations of the interruptions that were still happening in the classroom. I shared with the students that I was feeling frustrated and I told them of a new concept I had heard about. After sharing it with them, they were eager to try it out.

## **Three Before Me**

The concept is simple. Before approaching a teacher, the child must ask at least three peers for help. If after three peers, the child still does not understand (or is dissatisfied with the answer), he/she may then approach the teacher. I emphasized with my students that this did not mean that they were then free to interrupt. I asked their input as to how they thought they could make their presence known. They decided to use the name tags that we used to mark our work. They placed a small basket in the centre of the classroom and anyone who had a question could put their name tag in the basket. After the lesson, the teacher would then check the basket and help whoever needed it.

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The children were very enthusiastic to try this out. It seemed that they needed the extra reassurance that it was alright to ask a peer. We joyfully left the meeting determined to give it a try.

The next time I presented a lesson, a student came up and started "Miss Michelle...". Before he could finish, I very gently held up three fingers and quietly stated "Three Before Me". He quickly nodded, turned away, and found a friend to help. This happened quite a bit over the next few days but the children quickly got used to it. I was able after a day or two to simply hold up three fingers without speaking and they would go and seek a peer. I also started hearing students remind other students "Three Before Me".

After a few days, my students were no longer interrupting while teachers were presenting lessons or helping others. Calm had returned and the children felt more empowered. When we discussed it at our next class meeting, the children said it was a liberating feeling and they appreciated being able to ask their friends. They also said they appreciated being able to have a lesson without interruptions. As teachers, we said we appreciated not being interrupted while we were helping students learn and that we felt proud that they were acting so responsibly and respectfully toward one another.

I soon heard from other teachers about the transformation in my classroom. When I explained what had transpired and how simple it was to implement, they, too, started employing "Three Before Me" in their classroom.

Sometimes it's easy to assume that just because it's a Montessori classroom, the obvious does not need to be stated or that rules do not need to be reviewed. Without lecturing, classroom management issues can be addressed when a little creativity and mutual respect is applied.

**On Alternative Education: <http://www.indigochild.com/schools.html>**

### **As Written in the Indigo Children Book: A Review**

What kind of school would be an alternate, you might ask? The main attributes of such schools are easy to spot and very fundamental. They are as follows:

1. The students are honoured, not the system.
2. The students are offered reasonable choice regarding how the lessons are presented, and at what speed.
3. The curriculum is flexible from class to class, often changing due to WHO is doing the LEARNING in a certain group.
4. The children and teachers are responsible for setting the learning standard, not the system.
5. Teachers have great autonomy within their own student groups.
6. Old educational paradigms are not worshipped. New ideas are welcome.
7. Tests are constantly changed and re-worked to fit the skills and awareness of the information being taught and absorbed. (Nothing is worse than a very bright child taking an old test that is far beneath them. They often will misunderstand or discard it mentally, and therefore fail it. The tests must evolve with the student's awareness.)
8. A constantly changing way of doing things is the norm throughout the history of the institution.
9. It's probably controversial.

## Montessori Students and Community Service

From the NAMC Blog site <http://montessoritraining.blogspot.com/>

Posted by Michelle Irinyi on 29 January 2009.

*Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve.*

*-Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The day before his inauguration, Barack Obama set an example for the American people by doing community service. Visiting wounded soldiers, painting a wall at a teen shelter, and visiting other volunteers, he modelled before the nation his "call to service".

I feel so proud of those of us who are dedicated to Montessori education. After all, we've been teaching service and service learning all along. We model and teach our Montessori students to be stewards and caretakers of the Earth and its inhabitants. By doing so, we create caring, empathetic students who are capable of thinking beyond themselves. It was Dr. Montessori's vision that a peaceful world, created by children, would make the world a better place. Montessori teachers know that by performing community service, we are helping develop and educate the whole child. Students learn the joy of giving of themselves, and develop compassion because of these real, practical life volunteer experiences.

Community service projects can be accomplished at all levels and in all age groups in the Montessori school. Louise Seabrook Knisley of the Montessori School of Anderson, South Carolina suggests that Primary and Lower Elementary students are capable of visiting residents of assisted living facilities. They can make holiday cards, bake cookies or bread, and make special art projects and decorations for their new friends. They can also take part in food, toy, personal hygiene, or coat drives. Doing so teaches them that although they are young, they can and do make a contribution to their community.

Upper Elementary Montessori students function more independently. They can read to or listen to younger students read. They act as tutors and mentors for younger students, keeping Dr. Montessori's vision of peer learning alive. Upper Elementary students also have the ability to embrace greater responsibility in their community service efforts. They can volunteer at soup kitchens, food banks, and animal shelters. They can help rake or shovel the yards of elderly neighbours. They can help with Special Olympics or similar events. They can adopt a family in need and assist them throughout the year, not just at the holidays. They can plant gardens and flowers to share with those less fortunate in their communities. They can paint murals over walls defiled by graffiti.

Youth learn by observing the world around them. Therefore, it is important that adults model our commitment to giving back to the community. Adults should take an active role to involve their families in their communities in addition to what students do in school.

I have previously written about the types of service learning and community service projects I have done in my own Montessori classrooms. Through our efforts such as a personal hygiene products drive to help the victims of the California wildfires to baking cookies for a local Ronald McDonald House to making quilts for Habitat for Humanity, I have seen great personal growth in my students. Their compassion for those around them has grown exponentially when they give of themselves. As a tutor for NAMC, I continue to read about the wonderful community service projects that Montessori teachers and students around the world are doing. Each time I read these stories, it warms my heart to know that young people around the globe are doing so much to make our world a better place.

Please feel free to share your community service experiences and ideas. Let us rejoice and learn from each other.

It is our wish that every child grow to be good citizens of the world. It is up to us as Montessori guides and teachers to teach and model global thinking for our children. Mr. President, we Montessorians are up to your challenge.



The land is where our roots are. The children must be taught to feel and live in harmony with the Earth.

Maria Montessori

## What is a Democratic School? By Sharon Caldwell

The concept "Democratic School" is not easy to define. There is no obvious founder nor any clearly defined movement as one has with Montessori. For all intents and purposes a "democratic school" is a school which considers itself as such. Thus the term "democratic school" could be seen as umbrella for some very diverse educational establishments.

Isaac Graves and Dana Bennis in their Directory of Democratic Education (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition AERO, 2007) offer what they call "an inexact synthesis of the varying descriptions" thus:

*Democratic Education is an educational approach grounded in respect for human rights and a broad interpretation of learning, in which young people have the freedom to organize their daily activities, and in which there is equality and democratic decision-making among young people and adults.*

The umbrella term "democratic school" is sometimes applied to "free schools" which are sometimes, but not necessarily democratic, while not all democratic schools are free schools. This is somewhat confusing to the initiated. This is because, with a few rare exceptions, every school is unique, and many democratic education groupings are not even schools in the true sense of the word. To really get a grip on this phenomenon one needs to examine a variety of the many individual schools, community resource centres, intentional communities, colleges and other groups which comprise this eclectic approach to learning and living.

There is a large degree of overlap in the defining features of democratic schools and Free Schools, although not all free schools are, strictly speaking, democratic. Some "democratic schools" actually draw their inspiration from the anarchist movement – most particularly from Leo Tolstoy's school Yasna Polyana (where incidentally he noted behaviour very similar to that described by Maria Montessori as "Normalisation") and Francisco Ferrer's Modern School in Barcelona. These in turn were influenced by the Libertarian tradition of Rousseau and William Godwin, and as such are not, strictly speaking, democratic at all in the sense that the word democratic is normally used. Many democratic schools acknowledge the pivotal role of A. S. Neill's school, Summerhill in their guiding principles, or pay homage to the myriad of free and community schools which sprang up across the US in the 60s and 70s.

Only the Sudbury Valley schools have any common defining principles, or belong to any group which accredits or oversees adherence to clearly laid down criteria. In short, the term "Democratic School" defies any definition which could be agreed to by all those who use the name.

Probably the best known democratic school is Summerhill School, which was founded by A.S. Neill in the 1920s and is still in operation in Leiston, England. The two principal features that distinguish Summerhill from a regular school is that classes are not compulsory, and that most major decisions are made by the students and staff (each person having one equal vote) at a weekly meeting, chaired by a student. Summerhill challenged an Ofsted ruling in 1999 mandating compulsory classes, took the British Education authority to court and won the right to continue operating according to its founding principles. The story of the court case was recently dramatized on BBC, portraying the school fairly accurately. (Read about it here: <http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/bbc-drama.html> )



Picture taken by Jerry Mintz – School meeting passed a ruling that games could not be played in the computer room during certain hours. Children at Summerhill take the rules very seriously!

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Even though the general ethos at Summerhill places more emphasis on play than on anything that looks like academics, the school achieves significant success in the regular CGSE exams.

<http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/>

Sand School in Devon, on the other hand, is intentionally more focused on academics, but also has a somewhat older student body. <http://www.sands-school.co.uk/Home.html>

According to the Directory of Democratic Education, there are some 200 known democratic schools in 29 countries, but this figure is probably way below the true number. Some organizations, such as Room 13, (<http://www.room13scotland.com/>) which exists inside of regular schools, are not listed, for example. Nor are the many projects which fall under the wing of CWC (Concern for Working Children) in India, which extends its work with children's democracies into the local panchayats (municipalities). CWC is, by the way, infused with Montessori methods and practice, as well as her social philosophies. Namma Bhoomi in rural Karnakarta follows Dr. Montessori's *Erdkinder* vision practically to the letter. (<http://www.workingchild.org/>)

Possibly the biggest group of Democratic Schools following the same guidelines is the Sudbury Valley Network. Sudbury Valley Schools are firmly grounded within the American understanding of democracy. In the entry for Longview School the schools approach is described:

"We believe students learn based upon what they experience, not simply upon what they are told. Our students learn about making responsible decisions by being active participants in a vibrant, fully empowered, one-person one-vote school democracy. Our students learn about ethics and justice through participation in a student-run judicial system modelled on the American courts."

A principle feature which distinguishes the Sudbury Network from other Democratic Schools is the insistence that the adults in the environment may not even suggest or recommend areas of study to the students, but need to wait until they are asked. Most other Democratic Schools have the adults playing a more direct role in helping students select work, either individually or as a group. Another feature is that there is no age differentiation whatsoever in a Sudbury school, whereas loose age groupings may be found in Free Schools.

The "Free School" model, (see for example the Albany Free School) tends to be less structured than Sudbury Schools with the adults playing a role which is a little more related to the role of a Montessori teacher than the adults in a Sudbury School, but much less authoritarian than a regular teacher. Free Schools are blossoming across the United States.

Decision making processes in Democratic Schools vary as much as their approaches to education. Some, such as the Sudbury Schools and The New School (see <http://www.thenewschool.com/>) use a modified version of Roberts Rules of order (<http://www.robertsrules.org/>). Others follow the Quaker or Iroquois models, some (such as Nahoon Montessori School in East London) use the Sociocratic Model. Yet others develop their own unique or eclectic methods as part of the learning process.

Anyone wanting more information, links to schools and other projects, books and articles should begin by visiting <http://www.educationrevolution.org/> or feel free to email me at [shaornaldwell@montessori.org](mailto:shaornaldwell@montessori.org) and I will be happy to send you off in the right direction.

#### WHY SHOULD MONTESSORI EDUCATORS KNOW ABOUT DEMOCRATIC/FREE SCHOOLS?

Montessori educators should take note that the democratic school movement (if it could be called that) as it is in these schools that some of Montessori's principles are being honoured in a way that is not seen in the vast majority of Montessori schools.

First and foremost, Montessori called for us to observe children in a state of liberty. In many Montessori schools, with their tight academic programmes, this is no longer possible. Does a Montessori school exist where children are truly free to choose any occupation at any time of the day – a principle which Dr Montessori expounded but which has been seriously undermined in the pursuit of academic

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advancement? If indeed normalization is a result of freedom, are we on the wrong track with our expensive equipment and tightly controlled environments. We need to ask whether the same end could not be achieved in a simpler, more cost-effective way.

Montessori education has become, in many ways, a bastion of conservatism. We need to remind ourselves that Montessori was a revolutionary – not only in an educational sense, but in a socio-political sense as well. She hoped that her methods would lead to a New World, a truly different world-order. The regular school paradigm was designed and maintained to support the status quo, not to promote social regeneration. The epistemology of alternative/democratic education resists the paradigm of schooling and enables us to think differently about learning and education. Changes in curriculum content have little effect in an organizational structure which re-inforces hierarchy and domination. The democratic models provide alternative structures and goals which are more in keeping with Montessori's vision than the factory model of conventional school.

***A universal revolution is what we need. This revolution requires only that man should raise his values and become the master instead of the victim, of the environment he himself has created.***

***Maria Montessori - The Formation of Man, p. 13.***

***Independence is the last conquest and freedom is the first necessity. So when people are free in this sense they become independent, because independence is a conquest that begins with the individual and then it leads to the organization of the society. Lecture 32 Society in Cohesion. California Lectures 1946***

Although Dr Montessori took great pains to portray herself as apolitical, there is some evidence that she supported the notion of children playing a more decisive role in the decisions which affect their lives:

"There is a further and fundamental problem, the problem of the freedom of the child. The distinction between Democracy and Totalitarianism has still to be faced. Is the child to be left free to form himself or is he to be formed? The question of the freedom of the child and the freedom of nations demands an urgent solution." (What you should know about your child).

### Book Review by Sam Streak

Living Sunlight – How Plants Bring the Earth to Life by Molly Bang and Penny Chisholm Published by Blue Sky Press, New York (ISBN-10: 0-545-04422-7) Available on [www.loot.co.za](http://www.loot.co.za)

The blurb on the back of this book reads "Life keeps circling round and round on our planet Earth. Come along and explore the wonder of how our sun gives life to plants and all living things – including YOU!"

I first read about this book through a Montessori listserv. It is a beautiful, full colour book essentially about the importance of the sun and photosynthesis. The words are simple and accurate and would be an excellent resource in both a pre-school and lower primary environment. The illustrations are really stunning and the children love it. There is also additional and more detailed information at the end of the book for older children and adults. I would highly recommend this book.

## Waldorf Education ([www.waldorf.org.za](http://www.waldorf.org.za))

The Federation of Waldorf Schools in Southern Africa is an association of independent schools and teacher training institutions, which work out of the pedagogical indications of Rudolf Steiner.

### The Developing Human Being

The basis of the Waldorf curriculum is the developing human being and the aim is to prepare children for life. We believe that Waldorf Education has the power to awaken in growing human beings those forces and abilities that they will need for the rest of their lives in order to work competently for their community of contemporaries and to have a livelihood that will sustain them.

Many different competencies are needed for the individual to develop and thrive in the conditions current in the world today and in the South Africa of tomorrow.

Learners today live in a knowledge-based world and a knowledge economy, in which technology has transformed many aspects of life and work. Young people can look forward to working lives demanding flexibility, frequent shifts between employers and roles and a high degree of adaptability. They will also be expected, and may indeed prefer, to take responsibility for their own destinies in regard to education and training and financial security. It will fall to them to define their own career patterns. This new and often insecure world will offer enormous opportunities as well as make enormous demands on individuals and it is vital that they are properly prepared for this.

Within the context of Waldorf education, competence is regarded as the ability to understand and do. This aptly sums up the essence of Waldorf educational aims, not only to be able to understand but to be able to do as well. One might add, to understand and do out of insight in freedom.

One of the key competencies that we aim to teach is the ability to learn from life. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of this form of education states, \*

The important thing is learning to learn, so that, however old one is, one can remain, up to the very year of one's death, a student of life...It is important that we discover an educational method where people can learn how to learn, to go on learning from life their whole life long.

At the same time children come to school today with many more weaknesses and learning disabilities. Their concentration and ability to take in information is weaker. The capacity to be part of a group is weakened because they are less aware of others around them and are used to more instant gratification of their wishes. Their motor co-ordination is less developed because life presents them with too few opportunities to develop it at the right age. Children's hearing is less focused and often damaged due to exposure to loud music through earphones and because it has been de-sensitized by background incidental music. They have learned to filter out and that hinders their ability to distinguish the essential from the inessential.

As educators, we have to look at the situation of children as objectively as we can and create environments, both physical and cultural, in which they can develop the base skills and competencies they need at the right time. Sometimes this means deferring some experiences, in other cases it means getting on with things we used to leave until later.

Instead of keeping education mainly theoretical and remote from real life (the main trend for the last hundred years) Waldorf education teaches learners to learn from life, learn through doing and making – ways of learning that the latest research shows is far more effective.



The following overview of the Reggio Emilia Approach was taken from a packet of information available at *The Hundred Languages of Children* traveling exhibit:

Hailed as an exemplary model of early childhood education (Newsweek, 1991), the Reggio Emilia approach to education is committed to the creation of conditions for learning that will enhance and facilitate children's construction of "his or her own powers of thinking through the synthesis of all the expressive, communicative and cognitive languages" (Edwards and Forman, 1993). The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is a city-run and sponsored system designed for all children from birth through six years of age. The Reggio Emilia approach can be viewed as a resource and inspiration to help educators, parents, and children as they work together to further develop their own educational programs. The Reggio Emilia approach is based upon the following principles:

**Emergent Curriculum:** An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests of children. Topics for study are captured from the talk of children, through community or family events, as well as the known interests of children (puddles, shadow, dinosaurs, etc.). Team planning is an essential component of the emergent curriculum. Teachers work together to formulate hypotheses about the possible directions of a project, the materials needed, and possible parent and/or community support and involvement.

**Project Work:** Projects, also emergent, are in-depth studies of concepts, ideas, and interests, which arise within the group. Considered as an adventure, projects may last one week or could continue throughout the school year. Throughout a project, teachers help children make decisions about the direction of study, the ways in which the group will research the topic, the representational medium that will demonstrate and showcase the topic and the selection of materials needed to represent the work. Long-term projects or *progettazione*, enhance lifelong learning.

**Representational Development:** Consistent with Howard Gardner's notion of schooling for multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia approach calls for the integration of the graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic, and social development. Presentation of concepts and hypotheses in multiple forms of representation - print, art, construction, drama, music, puppetry, and shadow play -- are viewed as essential to children's understanding of experience. Children have 100 languages, multiple symbolic languages.

**Collaboration:** Collaborative group work, both large and small, is considered valuable and necessary to advance cognitive development. Children are encouraged to dialogue, critique, compare, negotiate, hypothesize, and problem solve through group work. Within the Reggio Emilia approach multiple perspectives promote both a sense of group membership and the uniqueness of self. There high emphasis on the collaboration among home-school-community to support the learning of the child.

**Teachers as Researchers:** The teacher's role within the Reggio Emilia approach is complex. Working as co-teachers, the role of the teacher is first and foremost to be that of a learner alongside the children. The teacher is a teacher-researcher, a resource and guide as she/he lends expertise to children (Edwards, 1993). Within such a teacher-researcher role, educators carefully listen, observe, and document children's work and the growth of community in their classroom and are to provoke, co-construct, and stimulate thinking, and children's collaboration with peers. Teachers are committed to reflection about their own teaching and learning.

**Documentation:** Similar to the portfolio approach, documentation of children's work in progress is viewed as an important tool in the learning process for children, teachers, and parents. Pictures of children engaged in experiences, their words as they discuss what they are doing, feeling and thinking, and the children's interpretation of experience through the visual media are displayed as a graphic presentation of the dynamics of learning. Documentation is used as assessment and advocacy.

**Environment:** Within the Reggio Emilia schools, great attention is given to the look and feel of the classroom. Environment is considered the "third teacher." Teachers carefully organize space for small and large group projects and small intimate spaces for one, two or three children. Documentation of children's work, plants, and collections that children have made from former outings are displayed both at the children's and adult eye level. Common space available to all children in the school includes dramatic play areas and worktables for children from different classrooms to come together.



## **Sustainable Education by Jerry Mintz (GreenMoneyJournal.com October/November 2002 issue) Used with permission of the author**

What is NOT sustainable is the national craze of high stakes testing. It is from the last vestiges of a failed education system. Its paradigm was "We are the teachers. We have all the information you will need to have a productive life. Just listen to us, learn what we think you should learn, and you'll be set for life."

Well, if that paradigm was EVER useful, it certainly doesn't work in today's world. What people need today (and children ARE people!) is confidence in themselves as learners, tools so they can find the answers to their questions themselves, preparation for life-long learning, and in general, a learner-centered approach rather than one which is curriculum driven.

And most important, memorizing facts is NOT important (and this is the most typical aspect of high stakes testing). When Albert Einstein was once asked the speed of sound he said, "I don't bother memorizing what I can easily look up!"

We've been through this before. The Eight Year Study of progressive schools in the 1930's came up with a very definitive result: Progressive and learner-centered schools were more effective for students than traditional school! This was true during high school, during college and after college for the progressive students. As of 1940 people expected a dramatic shift in how schools were run. But then came the Second World War, followed immediately by the creation of teachers unions. Since there were no unions for the students, the teacher's voice has held sway since then, freezing the system in place in a form which continues today, almost unchanged, and increasingly anachronistic.

Did you even wonder which forces created an authoritarian public school system in a society which prides itself on being the world home of democracy? That's a long story. You can read some theories about it in John Gatto's book, *Underground History of American Education*. Suffice it to say that this system is not the proper preparation needed for students to ultimately participate in a democracy. Is it any wonder that fewer and fewer people vote in local and national elections?

Nevertheless, there is an education revolution going on, and it is long overdue. It is moving in the diametrically opposite direction of the "testing" push. The latter comes from the bureaucrats from within that dying system, who do know there is something wrong. But since they can't think "out of the box," the only remedy they can come up with is longer hours, more homework, and "teaching to the test," in other words, more of the same. The education revolution is coming from people who have created alternative schools and programs, thousands of them, and from others who have checked "none of the above" and have decided to home educate. There are now nearly two million people home educating. The first charter school was started in 1991. Now there are 2500 of them! And there are over 7500 additional alternatives in our database and many thousands more we have yet to discover. All of these fall in the general category of "learner-centered" approaches. We list many of them in our book, *The Almanac of Education Choices*. These people are steadfastly OPPOSED to the governmental thrust for more "standardization" and testing.

So a battle is looming. The testers will ultimately lose. It has happened before, most recently in the 80's with the "Back to Basics" movement. The question is only how long it will take, and how much destructiveness will happen in the interim.

The new education revolution was sparked by the publication of the book *Summerhill*, by A.S. Neill, about the Summerhill School, which he founded in 1921. When that book was published in the United States in 1961 it led immediately to the free school movement, with the creation of thousands of democratic, learner-centered schools. They lasted an average of 18 months. But many of them survived, even to this day, such as Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Massachusetts, recently featured on CBS's 60 Minutes. Now, dozens of schools based on Sudbury Valley are starting around the country.

Meanwhile, the free school movement led to the public school's alternative school movement, and thousands exist today. Some, called "choice" public alternatives are open to any student who wants a more learner centered approach. Others, called "public at-risk," are for children who have not been successful.

These phenomena gave rise to the charter school movement, where a group of parents and teachers can start a school free of the usual red tape and regulations, but as long as it meets certain goals and is non-discriminatory, it gets reimbursed on a per pupil basis with public school funds.

John Holt, who wrote a series of books critical of the public schools, including *How Children Fail*, finally gave up on the system and wrote one called *Teach Your Own*, which was a catalyst for the home education movement.

Recently Ron Miller, a historian of holistic education, has released a book about the free school movement called *Free Schools, Free People, Education & Democracy after the 1960's*.

Last summer's decision by the Supreme Court legitimizing the fledgling voucher programs around the country could have a further impact. This allows states or municipalities to create programs where parents may use the money designated for their children's education in another public or private school.

All of these, public and private, are potential models for the education of the future. However, one which has not yet been mentioned is the homeschool resource centre. With the explosive growth of home education, it is now possible to set up centres for home educators in which a variety of social activities take place. They are now scattered around the country, but it is only a matter of time before their influence becomes greater. This will enable even working parents to home educate their children. The parents take the basic educational responsibility, but the centres are available as a resource for them as often as they want or need it. One example is Pathfinder Education Centre in Amherst, Massachusetts, where 40-50 students attend up to five days a week, studying what they wish. Another example is Puget Sound Community School in Seattle, WA, which started out meeting in borrowed spaces three days a week. Starting next year they will have their own space.

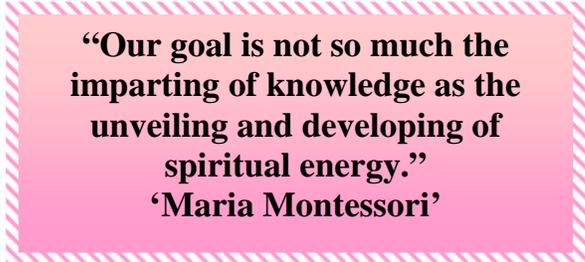
This revolution is not limited to the United States. For example, the School of Self-Determination is a 1200 student, inner city public school. The school is run by an elected parliament. They have a constitutional right to leave any class without explanation, and they interview the teachers, have them do test classes, and then vote on who is to be hired. The school is in Moscow, Russia!

As I write this I am about to go to the 10th International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC), in Christchurch, New Zealand, organized by Tamariki School, a democratic school. Seven of us will go from here, including a contingent from Albany's Free School, a democratic, inner city school in Albany, New York. The interracial school has no minimum tuition. Most of its funds come from donations from residents of row houses they have renovated which they bought at auction for as little as \$500. The students and staff raised the funds to go on this trip. The Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO) and the Free School hope to co-host next year's IDEC for the first time in the United States in 2003.

For more information about all of this, go to our website at- [www.educationrevolution.org](http://www.educationrevolution.org) and follow the links, or call us at (800) 769-4171.

Founder of The Alternative Education Resource foundation and long-time educational reformer, Jerry Mintz lives in New York State.

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**“Our goal is not so much the imparting of knowledge as the unveiling and developing of spiritual energy.”**  
**‘Maria Montessori’**

## Member's Page

To Deirdré & Sam & the rest of the Gang,

Thanking you for the brilliant and most inspiring newsletters. I truly appreciate them and it comes with something valuable and wisdom at the right moment. May you and SAMA:

*May you have...*

*Enough happiness to keep you sweet,  
Trials to keep you strong,  
Sorrow to keep you human,  
Hope to keep you happy,  
Failure to keep you humble,  
Success to keep you eager,  
Friends to give you comfort,  
Wealth to meet your needs,  
Enthusiasm to look forward,  
Faith to banish depression,  
Determination to make each day better than yesterday.*

Remember, you guys are doing a fantastic job. My membership remains the same as before, all deposits will be done at the end of Feb. Just to let you know, that Woolworths is running a fabulous programme called: "Behaviour for Life – How a healthy, balanced diet can improve your child's behaviour" – which is so needed right now. For more info – [www.woolworths.co.za](http://www.woolworths.co.za) - click on food/wine and then on healthy eating. I have found it to be very beneficial at our school. I found great strength with the prayer on Love and love it to bits. We have begun practicing it at our school too - very inspiring and calming. We have also embarked on a Wellness Programme, allowing the children to do hand and feet massages on each other. We have encouraged the children to learn the virtue of gratitude and also continued to extend "Helping Hands" to charitable organisations.

*May you and all those you love be so blessed and fortunate to be surrounded by people who will help you get untangled from the things that are binding you. And may you always know the joy of giving and receiving gratitude.*

I thank-you in gratitude for all the time, effort you guys put into S.A.M.A.

Much Appreciated and Lots of Love  
Narvada Mahabeer  
Great Heights Montessori Pre-School (Durban)

**The SAMA 2009/10 Membership year commences 1 April 2009. Renewal forms have been sent to School members and will be sent to other categories shortly. Please ensure that the forms are completed correctly and returned together with confirmation of payment (correctly referenced) to ensure that your membership is updated.**

### COMMUNITY SERVICE IDEAS:

- Make get well cards for people in hospitals and convalescent homes.
- Knit or crochet blankets.
- Plant a tree or present a tree to the parents for each baby born in your community.
- Collect old stuffed animals and dolls, clean them up, repair them and donate them.
- In art class, make drawings and decorations for senior citizens.
- Collect school supplies to give to kids who need them.
- Collect children's books for the needy.
- Collect items to deliver to homeless shelters (blankets, sheets, towels, toys, books.)
- Volunteer to clean up trash at a community event / hold a clean up day at a park or beach.
- Start a recycling centre at school.
- Hold an invention contest with entries made out of recycled goods.
- Form a kids carwash squad to clean and wash seniors' cars / raise money for a charity.
- Raise money for pet causes by organizing a pet photo session.
- Collect food and supplies needed for a local zoo, animal shelter.

*Ideas taken & adapted from the 366 Community Service Ideas page of the UNL website.*

<http://lancaster.unl.edu/4h/serviceideas.shtml>



# Life's little BIG handbook

## Health:

- \* Drink plenty of water.
- \* Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a beggar.
- \* Eat more foods that grow on trees and plants and eat less food that is manufactured in plants.
- \* Live with the 3 E's -- Energy, Enthusiasm, and Empathy.
- \* Make time to practice meditation, yoga, and Prayer.
- \* Play more games.
- \* Read more books than you did the year b4.
- \* Sit in silence for at least 10 minutes each day.
- \* Sleep for 7 hours.
- \* Take a 10-30 minutes walk every day. And while you walk, smile.

## Personality:

- \* Don't compare your life to others'. You have no idea what their journey is all about.
- \* Don't have negative thoughts or things you cannot control. Instead invest your energy in the positive present moment.
- \* Don't over do. Keep your limits.
- \* Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
- \* Don't waste your precious energy on gossip.
- \* Dream more while you are awake.
- \* Envy is a waste of time. You already have all you need.
- \* Forget issues of the past. Don't remind your partner with his/her mistakes of the past. That will ruin your present happiness.
- \* Life is too short to waste time hating anyone. Don't hate others.
- \* Make peace with your past so it won't spoil the present.
- \* No one is in charge of your happiness except you.
- \* Realize that life is a school and you are here to learn. Problems are simply part of the curriculum that appear and fade away like algebra class but the lessons you learn will last a lifetime.
- \* Smile and laugh more.
- \* You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.

## Society:

- \* Call your family often.
- \* Each day give something good to others.
- \* Forgive everyone for everything.
- \* Spend time with people over the age of 70 & under the age of 6.
- \* Try to make at least three people smile each day.
- \* What other people think of you is none of your business.
- \* Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends will. Stay in touch.

## Life:

- \* Do the right thing!
- \* Get rid of anything that isn't useful, beautiful or joyful.
- \* However good or bad a situation is, it will change.
- \* No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.
- \* The best is yet to come.
- \* Your Inner most is always happy. So, be happy.
- \* Love unconditionally~!

## Vacancies

**Bubbly Kidz Montessori Pre-school opening** in Pretoria Faerie Glen for children aged 2 - 6 yrs. Loving, safe and stimulating environment with qualified directress. **Contact:** 083 32 88864 or [marizete.deabreu@gmail.com](mailto:marizete.deabreu@gmail.com)

**The Montessori Beehive Pre-school** situated in Durbanville, Cape Town is looking for a qualified **Directress / Assistant** for the **3 – 6 year group**, to start in April 2009. Please contact Carol on 021-919 4223 or email CV to [beehive1@telkomsa.net](mailto:beehive1@telkomsa.net)

**The Children's Studio Montessori** pre-school in Harfield Village is seeking to fill the following position in March/April 2009: Montessori **Directress for 3-6 years class**. Qualified, preferably with experience. Please e-mail CV to [childrenst@telkomsa.net](mailto:childrenst@telkomsa.net) or call Ingrid 021-6831437

**Morning Star Montessori** in Faerie Glen Pretoria has a vacancy for an experienced, Montessori qualified 3-6 Head Directress to start January 2009. The vacancy has arisen due to staff relocation overseas. Top salary offered to the successful applicant. Please contact Jenny on 082 602 4427.



TEACHER: Glenn, how do you spell "crocodile?"  
GLENN: "K-R-O-K-O-D-I-A-L"  
TEACHER: No, that's wrong.  
GLENN: Maybe it is wrong, but you asked me how I spell it.

## Marketing

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If you would like to advertise in the SAMA Newsletter, please send the relevant information through to [admin@samontessori.org.za](mailto:admin@samontessori.org.za)

For more information on Job Vacancies, Associate Member (suppliers), Member schools and more, visit SAMA website [www.samontessori.org.za](http://www.samontessori.org.za)

**Focus for March 2009 issue:  
Parent Education and our Parent  
Community  
Deadline for submissions: 20 March**

*All 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 feel you would like to contribute, please send to Deirdré via: [admin@samontessori.org.za](mailto:admin@samontessori.org.za)*

## Regional Meetings for Term One 2009

Regional Meetings have been finalised for this Term, so please diarise them.

- **KZN**
- Regional Meeting 7<sup>th</sup> March 2009
- **Topic: "Inclusivity"**
  
- **Gauteng North & South**
- Regional Meeting Combined: 14<sup>th</sup> March 2009
- **Topic: Grade R: "Aligning the NCS with Montessori Practice"**

The Western Cape meeting was held on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2009.

### Available SAMA Products:

- **The 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.
- **SAMA Centenary Scrapbook.** A beautiful full colour compilation of Southern African Centenary and 100 steps Stories and photos. Cost R250 per book plus R25 package and postage.

For more details contact: [admin@samontessori.org.za](mailto:admin@samontessori.org.za)

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