

Going to the archives

**Montessori's
written
work can
unite and
inspire**



BY **PAULA LILLARD PRESCHLACK**

"Go to the Mattresses"

You may have heard people use that Godfather quote, "go to the mattresses." While this wording admittedly may carry a connotation of violence from its use in movies about the mafia, the expression ultimately means to prepare. It is derived from Italy, where families would rent empty apartments for hiding out during wartime in safer areas. "Going to the mattresses" was a way of hunkering down at the fullest measure. Because of the way people use it most often to mean, "getting serious about getting something done," I'm going to use a play on words to explain what I think we now need to do to spread the word about Montessori education.

Montessori is the answer

In these pandemic times, we're witnessing a crisis with our conventional education models; parents are looking for alternatives. This is the moment for Montessori enthusiasts to act! Americans are calling for change both in justice for how people treat one another and how we treat our natural environment. The problems we face in the world today demand more strongly than ever, the benefits that Montessori's approach to children's development offers. The best way for the next generation to prepare themselves to face a world of rapid change, increasing complexity, societal strife and environmental disruption, I

believe, is through this exceptional education.

You and I have seen the results first hand: the graduates of Montessori programs are usually more empathic, confident, effective, collaborative, aware and self-aware than most young adults who experienced the rigidity of conventional education or the disorganization of other progressive programs. Montessori graduates are poised to make a positive difference in the world. The education they've had works because it is balanced and based in discoveries about children's natural developmental needs and characteristics--no matter the time, place or culture they are born into.

One voice

To let people know about this wonderful educational approach, it is imperative that Montessori educators are clear about what Montessori is and what it means. We've got to stand together as a harmonious group and find one language to explain Montessori's benefits to the public. The factions between Montessori groups and the variation in interpretation and implementation of Montessori's work has historically held us back from bringing Montessori to the forefront of education in the United States. To get past this obstacle and move forward, we must "go to the mattresses," or I would say, "go to the archives," and come out with one clear message.

Denise Monnier of MPPI (the Montessori Public Policy Initiative), stresses that when approaching the public, Montessori educators must unite as one group and speak with one voice. MPPI sets a good example of uniting perspectives, as it was formed jointly by the leaders of two leading Montessori organizations, AMS and AMI/USA.

MPPI continues to invite all Montessori practitioners to work together as one team to address issues of public policy using a common language.

The value of having archives

One major difference between Montessori education and any conventional or progressive approaches is that we have a rich library of work to dive into and derive information from. Dr. Maria Montessori explained her discoveries in her writing and her speeches--discoveries that we find relevant and repeatable. The Montessori training courses offer foundations for learning about, studying and understanding this body of work. But now, to "go to the archives," we each have our own individual journey. We must continue to read Montessori's books, as our "archives," and to study children's behaviors and reactions to the materials in the classrooms. By doing so, our understanding of this approach will continue to grow. The more every educator reads and reflects, observes and interacts, the better prepared we are to articulate what works about Montessori's approach.

Finding the authenticity

As we join efforts to communicate to the general public, we've got to agree on what authentic Montessori is. Our common material to work from is Dr. Montessori's writings. It is very easy--and incredibly tempting--for adults to get caught up in their own, separate agendas. Dr. Montessori pointed out that children are very different beings from adults; what we think and what we want can get in the way of children's healthy development as the next generation.

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Sources

Some suggestions of my favorite sources, (all available on Amazon or other on-line resources):

By Maria Montessori:

Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents (2017)

I recommend this to everyone! It is short, has lots of colorful photographs of young children working, and explores major ideas and themes of Montessori's approach both in the classroom and at home.

The Absorbent Mind

London Lectures (2012)

Rome Lectures 1913 (2013)

Discovery of the Child

To Educate the Human Potential

The Citizen of the World, Key Montessori Readings (2019)

The Formation of Man

Education and Peace

Montessori materials and presentations in them:

The Advanced Montessori Method, Vol I and II

Psychogeometry (2011)

Pyschoarithmetic (2016)

The Montessori Approach to Music (2020)

For accessible books about Montessori's approach, read:

The Montessori Toddler, and *The Montessori Baby*, by Simone Davies and Junnifa Uzodike

Montessori A Modern Approach, or *Montessori Today*, by Paula Polk Lillard (available in many languages)

Maria Montessori, Her Life and Work, by E.M. Standing

If we don't want to perpetuate negative cycles in our society, then we must follow Montessori's call to remove obstacles, prepare environments, model inclusive, respecting behavior, and offer the healthy balance of choices and boundaries to the children. She wrote it out clearly for us, and through the lens of her work, all topics can be addressed in healthy, child-friendly ways. But we have to know the lens well and use it consistently. To do that, we must read and reflect on her writing, our "archives." This body of work gives us

the authentic Montessori approach.

Certainly, while sifting through Dr. Montessori's writings, you will find some tangential information, (she loved to tell stories to illustrate her points) some outdated ideas, (no, we no longer give credence to head and body-measuring, an anthropological interest in her day) a lot of repetition, (many quotes need editing to get to the point) and phrases that require explanation when taken out of a discussion's context. But if we take the time to build or borrow our libraries of Montessori

books, and then to read, study and reflect on the valuable content we find there, we will strengthen ourselves for the task ahead.

Working together

"Going to the archives" can also encourage us to get together and form reading discussion groups as teachers to connect Dr. Montessori's descriptions with what we observe in our classrooms. A discussion group can be a source of support, where members can be vulnerable to share worries, doubts and struggles, and to find the answers to guide work back in the classroom. There is always more to learn in Montessori's writings, always more ideas to try. By "going to the archives" in this way, we can prepare ourselves to articulate this wonderful educational approach, and to ultimately get it out into the popular culture to reach more children.

In our quest to support all children with the Montessori approach, let's "go to the archives!"

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