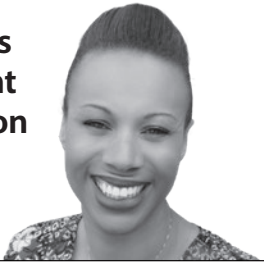


Global (re)entry to post-pandemic reality

**Let's honor
Montessori's
commitment
to adaptation**



BY **SARAH STEPHENS**

I type this article to the beat of my brain-stereo, playing Gloria Estefan's "Coming Out of the Dark." Released in 1991, the song was tattooed to my soul at the tender age of eight. I often match my head music to my moods and musings, and I'm grateful for these encouraging lyrics as our world peels back the next layer of social re-entry. Like the rest of our global community, I waiver with the stress of the acceleration while taking the lemons —social injustice, COVID, political polarization, global despair, and all my personal traumas—to make lemonade, for Dr. Montessori's "whole of mankind."

Our Montessori community has dramatically felt the impact of our snowballing societal sensitivities. Our common denominator is a lingering pandemic with a potential beginning to loosen its reins. No matter the level, directly and indirectly, we have all been impacted. Staggering data on the long-term societal effects of COVID alone is surfacing, revealing its negative impact on our most precious resource: our children.

As a Montessori teacher, consultant and parent in Littleton, Colorado, I have observed the data firsthand: child/adult social and emotional trauma, disenrollments, burnout, staff turnover, mistrust of public and private

systems of education due to lack of (or poorly supported) inclusion, and so on. The developing results portend a decrease in the quantity and quality of exceptional Montessori education for all. But don't lose hope quite yet. I believe the antidote, and therefore the key, to a successful and lasting re-entry lies in the wisdom of our namesake: Dr. Maria Montessori.

Montessori's path to an innovative system of education was solemn as she was a female who broke the mold of tradition. She fought to become one of Italy's first female doctors (and let's recognize this prestigious accomplishment by using her title, *Dr. Maria Montessori*). She viewed children as worthy and capable of leading their own development in a world that marked them as empty vessels dependent upon adults. The children she served were discarded by society due to their economic sta-

My personal, unforeseen challenges as a long term guest of *Hotel Pandemic Bubble* brought my 13+ years as a Montessori educator and administrator to a screeching halt. I wish I could blame these "unprecedented times" alone, but I saw the complexities of my being layering one on top of the other like the lamination process of a croissant—there was a lot going on. This state of paralysis led to a personal exploration of my why.

Why had I chosen to be in a field that on paper extended peace, belonging and acceptance to all but in practice delivers to a specific individual who fits in a microscopic box? Why would I continue to thumb through my training manuals night-after-night, spending countless (unpaid) hours to add more global perspectives and depth to match every member of my school community (including myself), the

I humbly list Dr. Montessori as the answer to my questions

tus and unconventional abilities. She had the courage to turn her back on her own country—the same one that highly celebrated her accomplishments at great lengths—because she refused to change her beliefs for the advancement of the dominant ideology. She used what could have been an oppressive punishment of house arrest on a different continent to practice humility with a foreign group of civilians, exchanging (rather than absorbing) cultures and wisdom for the advancement of all.

surrounding cities, and world? Why had I chosen to take on the anxiety of teaching children and adults outside of the typical *heroes and holidays*, refusing to deliver the same content on specific dates for the sake of tradition while simultaneously and unintentionally isolating myself? And why, when my courage to step outside of these norms proved successful on a larger (business) scale, did I allow myself to

continues >

be tokenized for the groundbreaking work I did in my school communities?

I humbly list Dr. Montessori as the answer to my questions because I am her. I empathize and deeply connect to the parallels of her challenges as I, myself, am outside of the box as a Black, female educational leader in the U.S. I have considered letting the door be slammed on my passion because of the mistreatment (and misunderstanding) of this jewel in education and those who are chosen as its “dignitary” participants, but I will decide whether or not I choose to close this door. In fact, I am taking every part of my Montessori life and spiritual experiences (a.k.a. my cosmic development) to re-open this door by working with Denver Montessori schools and teacher education programs to increase awareness of and pursue a genuine, lifelong relationship with the global community. Together, we are connecting the foundations of Montessori with the evolving needs of the child, the adult (who involves the educator AND the child’s caretakers), and the environment.

It is clear that our Earth is experiencing various levels of PTSD, from our distressed natural resources all the way to the top of the chain. I’ve accepted that there’s no herd-immunity from the challenges of our pasts, presents, and futures. On the other hand, we have watched the mysteries of survival through adaptation. We (or at least

my family) marvel at the picturesque documentaries narrated by David Attenborough, watching the miraculous evolution of species—it’s a natural perk to our cosmic design.

Dr. Maria Montessori adapted to her conditions, and we are blessed, a century later, with a growing system of education. In fact, despite the continuous decline in almost everything educational, Montessori has gained strength and more exposure throughout the debilitating global circumstances by catching the eyes of traditional educational practices. As more individuals courageously walk through this slowly (re-)opening door, those who have already gone through are being challenged to thrive in a world no longer capable of co-existence. Beyond the abstract of fear, anger and intolerance, lies a concrete human race in dire need of relationship. The quality of our relationships will depend on the quantity of meaningful interactions. Montessorians have a duty to adapt our practices of Peace Education to meet the equitable needs of our global citizens through authentic relationships.

As we recover from our pasts both collectively and individually, we must do more than simply absorb and robotically repeat Dr. Montessori’s timeless words: “The whole of mankind is one and only one, one race, one class, and one society.” We must take ownership of our elegant positioning in

Montessori and action to intentionally re-enter society as one body of endless beliefs that thoughtfully adjusts its behaviors with, of course, grace and courtesy. We must collaboratively reconstruct this Montessori lemonade stand, creating flavors to match the cravings of ALL who come... *my personal favorite is strawberry lemonade.*

Sarah is a Montessori early childhood educator and PAMS teacher trainer. Her current mission is Montessori for All via her project, Montessori Moves Mountains (3mforall.com).

MontessoriPublic

MontessoriPublic, the communications and advocacy platform for public Montessori is a publication of

NATIONAL CENTER for
MONTESSORI in the
PUBLIC SECTOR

Subscribe at montessoripublic.org

Noncommercial reproduction of this material is permitted and encouraged. Consult authors for rights to copyrighted articles.

Copyright 2022 National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector