



e-bulletin



January 2012 President's Letter

Dear friends,

In an interview with the New York Times in 1933, Maria Montessori described the world at that time as ‘... disappointed with itself and filled with disquieting fears.’ Her analysis resonates in today’s world.

Spot on Analysis by Maria Montessori

In that same interview she emphasized, ‘in the child, released at last from the domination of the adult and free to fulfil his own pure childhood personality, lies the hope of the regeneration of society and the creation of a new world.’ Unfortunately, the world was not ready to hear that visionary message and humanity almost destroyed itself.

We have learned much since then. We have learned about peace and world citizenship, and particularly we Montessorians have learned about education and its direct relationship with peace. But have we learned enough to avoid a new human disaster? Disasters are not be avoided by regulating finance nor by balancing budget. They can be avoided when we know how to live together and prepare the new generation to build peace.

Peace is not just a state of affairs that we enjoy or not. Peace is everybody’s concern and a shared responsibility. Peace depends on each individual human being. It is a way of life driven by a deep respect of others and a profound sense of self-respect. It requires an experience of living together as early as possible in the child’s life. It requires confidence in others as well as self-confidence. It requires the ability to observe and to understand the people and the world around us. That is precisely what Maria Montessori discovered in observing young children: they have a natural tendency to explore their environment, without fear but stimulated by curiosity; they are attracted by others and interested by differences; they are able to overcome conflicts without destroying relationships.

The practice of Montessori education for over one hundred years, all over the world, proves that the foundation for peace can be firmly established during the first years of life.

Lasting peace requires appropriate education, and again the Montessori message can help us. Respect is at the basis of the Montessori philosophy, respect for the child, consideration for



the child’s unique identity and personality and absolute respect for all differences. That is the basis for building a peaceful relationship. If you respect the other and you know that the other is respecting you, you are free of fear and feel no need to defend yourself against—often imaginary—aggression. This approach, observing the child as he or she is, allowing children to grow their own talents, will help him develop into a harmonious person.

All Montessorians have seen this happen, in the knowledge that Montessori is not a philosophy based on books, it is a practice. A practice that gives us the opportunity to observe that children have a natural tendency towards peace and harmony. A tendency that we adults have largely forgotten. We may think it is simple. It is not. We observe every day that children are open to dialogue and eager to discover differences. They do not know the fear of others. Yet we also know that such a natural tendency is fragile and too often “extinguished”. Too many parents and also sometimes too many teachers transfer their own insecurities and prejudices on to the children. Unfortunately, we observe that many children by the time they reach adolescence have become like their parents, driven by fear, chauvinism, obsessed with the need of self-protection; and therefore largely insecure and unprepared for dialogue. What a human waste. And yet we know what to do. Over a century of practice has offered to millions of children the opportunity to develop their natural talent for dialogue and mutual respect. Many of them have become veritable citizens of the world.

The Challenge

The practice of effective Montessori education is very demanding and requires serious efforts by the teachers as well as the parents. The current training capacity of Montessori teachers is insignificant compared to the minimum needed for creating a visible change in the world.



Let us recognize that combining peace, education and world citizenship is a difficult and ambitious task. But because we know that it can be done, we must do everything we can to achieve it. I believe that, contrary to the current mood, we can and should be optimistic. It can be done!

There is, however, one condition: the number of children around the world to have access to Montessori must increase dramatically. Short of this all the above will be just wishful thinking. We all know that we are embarking on a long and hard journey.

Strategic Actions

Three sets of strategic actions are vital:

1. Expansion and strengthening

As an association we need to reinforce our capacities to train, support, communicate, initiate activities, and promote research and development. And, we can report progress: an expanded training capacity, innovative and exciting work with adolescents, the development of new initiatives for supporting schools and parents, a re-energized relationship with our affiliates. We need to continue, expand and accelerate. Only a strong and vibrant AMI can lead and maintain that momentum.

2. Creating alliances

Success depends on our ability to create alliances. The challenge is simply too big for a small group like ours. Fortunately, many people, groups and organizations share our concern for peace and our understanding of education. The meeting of 'Educateurs sans Frontières' held in Dallas in the summer of 2011 is an excellent example.

A group of people from various backgrounds, origins and affiliations united and gelled very easily around the concept of the child as a source for a brighter future. Any differences, whether they were theoretical or technical, were quickly washed away by the commonly felt sense of urgency to engage in outreach initiatives. A number of plans have already been proposed, all driven on by the vision to give more children a chance to build their own future. Check the site amiesf.org for details.

We also know that the world of Montessorians is larger than AMI. Our differences are real and can be challenging, but what we have in common is important. We all believe that the natural talents of children are too often wasted. We all believe that this is to a large extent responsible for the sad state in which our world finds itself. We may not have enough in common to solve all our differences, but we can certainly set ourselves common goals and join hands. Last month in New York a group of leaders from various US Montessori organizations met for two days to explore that possibility. We participated and must continue in that direction.



Meeting in New York: Participants Trevor Eissler, Mark Powell, Steven Hughes, Sue Pritzker,

David Kahn, Ginny Riga, Janet McDonell, André Roberfroid, Virginia McHugh Goodwin, John Snyder and Richard Ungerer. Conveners and Consultants: Laurie McTeague, Marianna McCall, Stephanie Miller, Michael Randel, Sally Colella.

3. A bit of self-promotion may help

We may think that our movement is the right way to go, but many decision makers in the world of education are not sufficiently aware of our existence! If we want to have an impact on education on a larger scale, we need to gain influence—which comes from visibility and communication. Our timidity and divisions have been counterproductive. A huge effort is needed to join the conversation with relevant national authorities, with universities, with media and parents. Expanding our activities will open new opportunities to be heard. EsF projects in new countries will increase our visibility. Speaking with one voice will reinforce our credibility. Promoting research will give us access to universities. All of these ideas are already in the making, but will need the support and participation of every one of us.

Friends, this is a road map that takes us to a rough terrain. A new world is about to emerge and we have a role to play. The children will make this new world. If they are helped to develop heart and mind, they will build a world of harmony. If they are allowed to use their natural talents to acquire knowledge and grow empathy, they will enjoy peace.

Thank you for joining this daunting challenge.

André Roberfroid
President
Association Montessori Internationale



P.S. now live: the aid to life (click here) web site offering clear and helpful tips for parents with children in the ages of birth to three.

Click here to enjoy "Peace, Citizenship and Education", an address by André Roberfroid. Watch and be inspired.